Safety Check

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by justheretoreadhannibalfics

Summary

Will Graham wakes up in what appears to be an abandoned hospital, remembering only that he knew who the Minnesota Shrike was, and that he needed to save a girl from him. He quickly realizes things have changed a lot, and he doesn't know how long he was in the hospital alone. Luckily, a well dressed man shows up to help him out.

The beginning/premise is based on a webtoon I started reading before it was removed from where I read them, so if it seems at all familiar that might be it. T-T It was just such a good idea, especially for Hannigram.

1

Will woke up in the hospital, sitting up with a groan. He shook his head and wracked his brain for what had led to him being there.

He had been on his way to Jack. He knew who the Minnesota Shrike was. He needed to get him behind bars before he killed his daughter.

He must have been in an accident of some sort. He couldn't remember what had happened. How he had ended up in a hospital.

The building was oddly quiet, despite clearly being a hospital. There was no buzzing of lights or beep of monitors. Not even in the room Will had woken up in, where there were rows of empty beds in varying states of disarray. As if some had been occupied and since been hurriedly vacated. The only light came from the windows, through the thin, gauzy curtains. Will guessed the power was out, but there should have been emergency generators in that case. There should have been power.

Will swung his legs over the side of the bed, setting his bare feet on the cold floor. There was a layer of grit, as if the floor hadn't been cleaned in a while. That was definitely a concern. Hospitals were always clean. This one seemed to have been abandoned.

Will's mouth and throat were painfully dry, so he set out to find some water. He was clad in nothing but a hospital gown, but he couldn't hear anyone else in the building, so he wasn't too worried about being decent.

Outside the door of the room, the hall was dark and silent. Dust hung in the still air, suspended in stray beams of light. There were a few glass bottles littered on the floor, as if they had spilled there and been forgotten. It was all reminiscent of a strange dream or nightmare. Will wondered if he had dreamed it all, and would wake up at any moment to find himself in his own bed at home.

His thirst drove him further, in pursuit of water. He stepped out of his room and was hit by a strong smell of decay that further convinced him something was deeply wrong. He knew the smell of decomposing bodies, and this was it.

The next door Will came to, he peered through into a supply closet of sorts. There were mops and brooms hung on the wall, shelves of cleaning supplies, and buckets on the floor next to the rotting corpse of an orderly.

Will jerked back, nearly falling to the floor in the hallway. He managed to suppress a yelp of surprise and fear, feeling as if breaking the silence would be wrong in some way. Despite this, his foot brushed one of the glass bottles on the floor and sent it spinning across the hall where it hit the wall with a loud clang.

The sound echoed through the entire building, and Will heard reactionary sounds in the aftermath.

There was someone else there.

Will's first instinct was to call out to them, stop himself from being alone, but he didn't. They might be friend, or they might be foe. They could be the reason this man on the floor was dead instead of tending to his job or the patients. Something was wrong, and he would be an idiot for assuming anyone was a friend before he had a better idea of what was happening.

Shuffling footsteps were coming closer from somewhere down the hall. They had an unnatural pattern to them, making Will feel uneasy. It was like someone trying to walk casually with a broken leg. Or missing kneecaps.

When the first person came into view, Will immediately took off in the opposite direction. He didn't want to be anywhere near them.

Will had never been a fan of zombie movies or media in general, but he recognized what he was facing. The people had eyes that were completely clouded with decay, teeth rotting out of their mouths, and flesh that seemed to be rotting from the inside out, maggots crawling around on it and falling off as the bodies moved. If they had been regular corpses, Will would have guessed they were only a week dead, possibly fresher if the weather had been warm.

Will ducked into a room quickly and scanned to make sure he was alone. He didn't see anyone there, so he closed the door and pushed the bed over to barricade it. His muscles strained as if he hadn't moved in months, and he wondered how long he had been in the hospital before he had woken up.

Will tipped the bed so it was no longer on its wheels, wedging it against the door as best he could and turning to see what he had to work with.

There were growls and more shuffling sounds outside the door, and Will thought the process of decay must have been altered by whatever was keeping it miraculously alive, or the vocal cords would have been beyond use at this point.

The room he was in didn't seem to be a regular hospital room for patients. There were more tools and machines than the room he had woken up in, and he briefly thanked whatever powers that may be for that. There was more to work with.

First, there was a sink, and Will immediately went over and turned the handle, desperate for a drink. He was bitterly disappointed when no water came, but it did give him another clue as to how long he had been there. After the power failed, water should have kept working for a week or so. Depending on how soon after his accident the power grid went down, he had been there for at least that long.

Will sighed and turned to the rest of the room to find tools. The growling outside the door had stopped, but he hadn't heard the thing shuffle away, so he guessed they were still there.

Will dug through a few drawers before he found something he thought he could use.

Scalpels.

Will picked up one of the blades and examined it through the plastic. He could use it as a weapon if it came to that. It wasn't great, but it would do. He pulled off the wrapping and felt along the blade's edge to test the sharpness.

"I suppose we can abide by the rule of first come first served," A voice said, making Will whirl around, accidentally cutting his hand on the blade as he did, "but I rather think I am more in need of medical supplies than you are."

There was a man standing outside the window, which was standing open. His eyes were a deep burgundy red, giving Will more reason for pause.

A growl from behind the door.

"Who are you?" Will asked. His voice came out rough and painful due to it being so dry. It felt as if he hadn't spoken aloud in months. He really needed to find out how long he had been in the hospital.

The man smiled and climbed in through the window. He was absurdly dressed in a three piece suit, and his movements had a strange gracefulness to them.

"I am Doctor Hannibal Lecter," he said, brushing his clothes off smartly, "and who might you be?"

Will hesitated, but couldn't think of any good reason to refuse to answer.

"Will Graham," he said, keeping the scalpel held out defensively. A drop of blood hit the floor from his fist.

Lecter tipped his head, as if he recognized Will's name. Will wondered if he had been a doctor in this hospital.

"Well, Mister Graham," Lecter said easily, "you are very lucky to be alive. I imagine you must have been in a comatose state since this all began. It's a wonder you managed to wake at all."

Will chewed his lip nervously. He didn't trust this man, but he needed to know what had happened. He didn't really have a choice.

"I can't say yet if my being alive is lucky," he said, "I have no idea what's going on."

Lecter nodded. He pulled a bag from his shoulders and tossed Will a water bottle from its contents.

"In the cupboard to your left, you should find a few sets of scrubs. If you would like to leave this building, I imagine you would be more comfortable wearing something else."

Will looked down at himself, still clad in nothing but the paper gown. He begrudgingly agreed. The water was sweet and soothing on his parched throat and tongue.

"Are you going to help me?" he asked.

Lecter considered it for a long moment.

“I’ll help you survive until we reach the commune where other survivors are,” he agreed, “as it is no additional trouble for me. I only came for a few supplies.”

Will nodded and opened the cupboard. Just as Lecter had said, there were sets of scrubs stacked on the shelves. He found a set his size and pulled on the pants.

“Just you? Wouldn’t they send an entire team on a supply run? Or are there so few they would have no choice but to send someone as valuable as a doctor, all on his own?”

Lecter walked around the room, selecting tools from the trays and shelves with an expert eye. Will could tell he really was a doctor, so at least he knew something was true.

“They would have sent an entire crew, but the risk is too high. There is very little safety in numbers these days,” he answered, “I am the only one who can be sure to return with the items we need.”

Will pulled off the gown and pulled the shirt on over his head, then stopped to study the man. Aside from his strange clothing for the situation, he didn’t seem all that special.

“Because you’re the only one who knows what you need, or because you’re the only one who will survive to return?” Will asked.

Lecter turned to Will and smiled, showing he had a set of sharp teeth in his mouth.

“There are a few other medical professionals at this encampment,” he said, “but none with the unique advantage I have.”

Lecter didn’t offer to elaborate, and Will felt the strange premonition that he didn’t want to know. Instead, the man took his hand, the one that had been cut in his surprise, and wrapped it in gauze as efficiently as an army doctor. Will was momentarily speechless by the quick movements and sudden close proximity.

“Alright. You gonna let me know what’s been going on while I’ve been comatose?” Will asked, clearing his throat as the doctor stepped away from him, “From what I can gather, I’ve been out for over a week at least, but I can’t be sure. It seems like everything’s changed.”

Lecter nodded.

“I shall explain whatever I can, but for a time now we must be as quiet as possible. I need a few more things that are not in this room. You noticed the creatures out there react to sound.”

Lecter tipped his head at the door, which shook violently as the creature must have thrown itself against it. It sounded surprisingly strong for the state of decay Will had observed.

“Yeah,” he replied, “so what’s the plan to get past the guys outside the door?”

Lecter shouldered his bag and produced a scalpel from his jacket.

“I’ll deal with them, if you would be so kind as to remove the barricade. Once we are out, you must follow me as silently as possible.”

Will nodded and once again pulled the bed. He was frustrated by his own lack of strength, but he was determined to get through it.

The moment the door was clear, the first creature burst through and lunged at Lecter. The creature was clumsy and uncoordinated, and Lecter stepped out of the way with the grace of a dancer. He stuck the scalpel into the creature at the base of the skull, easily severing the spinal cord. The creature immediately dropped, unmoving.

Lecter bent and pulled the scalpel out, tossing the next creature over his back as it tried to attack him, then severing the spinal cord as he had the first body. There was only one more corpse this time, which Lecter easily dispatched with the same casual grace as he had the first two.

Will was stunned into silence by the display. He hadn’t expected the man to be so good at fighting like that. He moved like a trained dancer, an elegant brutality to his killing.

“Most prefer long range weapons, such as firearms, but I would just as soon avoid the noise,” Lecter said, quietly and matter of factly.

Will just nodded, not knowing what to say and wanting to avoid being too loud. Lecter just smiled and beckoned Will to follow as he walked out into the hall.

2

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will run into some trouble on their way to the survivor's camp.

“Alright, do you know the date?” Will asked, knowing this would give him the most information quickly. They were in the woods, away from the city where Lecter said the most creatures were. Lecter had found a storage room where there had been a pair of shoes Will’s size, and Will was grateful for it.

Lecter hesitated a moment, possibly anticipating Will’s reaction to the news.

“June thirteenth,” he answered.

Will froze, stopping dead in his tracks. Lecter stopped as well, watching as Will processed this information.

It had been April twenty-third when Will had found out who the Shrike was. He had been in a coma for nearly two months.

“What day did this all start?” he asked.

Lecter considered that for a moment, possibly doing some mental math.

“There is a bit of debate about that, as we do not have all the information regarding where or when it originated. An educated guess would be May tenth, though it could be a few days before or after.”

Will’s head spun, and he leaned against the nearest tree to avoid falling over.

“How the hell did I survive this long in a coma without medical care?” he asked, more to himself than anything.

Lecter studied Will carefully for a long moment, as if wondering the same thing. Will was no doctor, but being in a coma for months without care should have meant he had died. He couldn’t figure out how he was not dead.

“These are strange times, Mister Graham,” Lecter said gently, “we know very little about what causes many of the things we are dealing with.”

Will sighed and nodded, running a hand over his face. He had been asleep for nearly two months, but he felt tired already. There was just too much for his brain to process. He wanted to sleep. Wasn’t that a joke.

“Are we close to the camp?” he asked.

Lecter huffed a soft laugh.

“Not as near as you likely hope,” he answered, “just ahead is a portion of woods where we must be careful. It passes very near a city, and many of the walking corpses are gathered there.”

Will nodded again and pushed off the tree, forcing himself to return to the present moment. They still had ground to cover, and he needed to push on. He could process everything later.

“Call me Will,” he said, “I’m going to get tired of all that Mister Graham stuff real soon.”

Lecter smiled.

“Very well, then call me Hannibal. Quid pro quo.”

Will offered his own smile, likely far more tired and less pleasant looking. If there was one thing he could take as evidence that he really had been in a coma for all that time, it was that his stamina was all but gone. He would have to work hard to get back into shape.

“Alright. Hannibal it is.”

—

Will was trying to be quiet. He really was. It wasn’t his fault the ground was covered in dead branches and broken bottles. He didn’t even know why there would be so many broken bottles, but he also wasn’t about to ask if Hannibal knew.

Hannibal, of course, was walking with nearly silent steps. He was like a prowling cat, his feet somehow not disturbing the refuse in his way. It wasn’t fair for him to be that stupidly competent. Will didn’t understand how he was doing it, and he knew better than to ask right now.

Will could see Hannibal wince whenever he accidentally kicked a bottle or snapped a branch, though the man tried to hide it. Will felt like a burden, and there was nothing he could do about it. He would be lucky to get to the camp without Hannibal deciding to abandon him entirely.

He could see the buildings through the trees, and they looked oddly normal. If he hadn’t seen it firsthand, he wouldn’t have known anything was wrong.

Will had an intense moment of paranoia when he thought this could all be some elaborate joke played on him. It could be just the day after he had been in an accident, and someone set this entire thing up to make him believe the world was ending. He had only seen the inside of the hospital, then the outside of all these other buildings. He had seen one group of zombie-like creatures, and that could have possibly been just extremely good makeup or something. It was possible this was all a hoax.

Will discarded the notion, knowing there would be no realistic motivation for anyone to do such a thing. He knew it wasn't the truth, no matter if it was technically possible.

Will's foot caught on a branch that didn't move to let him continue on, and he fell to his hands and knees. Right into a pile of broken glass.

Will couldn't help the shout he gave out at the sensation of the glass slicing into his hands, but he did cut it off quickly. He grit his teeth together to keep from making more noise, and Hannibal was at his side in an instant.

Hannibal lifted Will's hands to examine them critically, his lips pressed into a frown. Will's hands were taking a real beating today. And his knees weren't in much better condition, the scrubs being little protection from the glass.

And Will heard something coming.

Hannibal must have heard it as well, but he didn't react immediately. Instead, he pulled Will to his feet, being careful of his hands, and gently led him further into the woods. Will didn't know if this was just to get away from where they had made so much noise and further from the buildings where the creatures were, or if Hannibal was going to decide to just leave Will behind because he was too much of a burden. He hoped Hannibal wasn't giving up on him.

Hannibal had Will sit on a fallen log as he pulled the pack from his shoulders and began to rummage through the contents. Will felt a bit guilty at the idea of Hannibal using his recently acquired supplies on him because he had been clumsy.

Will could still hear something coming, though it was farther away and might not be able to find them now if they were quiet.

Hannibal held up a bottle, and Will understood. He was about to pour alcohol into the wounds to disinfect them. Will had to be quiet and bear the pain. Will nodded, clenching his jaw shut and preparing for the sting of the alcohol. He could withstand pain, it had been the shock of the cuts that made him cry out before.

Will grimaced with the pain, but managed to keep his mouth shut and swallow the sounds he felt coiled in his lungs. Hannibal was careful and gentle, cleaning the cuts and inspecting them with a trained eye. Will was glad Hannibal was the one there, because he had dealt with medical professionals that were much worse. Hannibal was treating him with kindness, and not showing any impatience at the fact that their travel had been interrupted. He didn't seem at all bothered by the sounds of approaching creatures.

Just as Hannibal stood up, a scraggly dog wandered into view. It stopped once it set eyes on Will, staring at him with its head tipped curiously.

Hannibal didn't seem to notice the dog until it gave a loud bark, and the sounds of approaching monsters quickened. Hannibal spun around and fixed the dog with a look of pure venom, making Will worried he would kill it. Before he had the chance, though, one of the creatures came through the trees and he had to turn to meet it.

The force of the initial attack sent Hannibal stumbling back. He wrestled with the creature for a moment, as more emerged from the trees in the direction of where they had come. Will was frozen staring at the creatures that were once human, but now were so far from it they were hardly recognizable. Their flesh was falling from their bones, and he wondered how they managed to move at all. By all accounts, it didn't make sense.

Hannibal killed the creature that had first attacked him, and quickly moved on to the next. His movements were graceful and quick, again reminding Will of a dancer in the way he dodged and attacked.

There were too many of them. Will could see that, even though Hannibal was clearly capable of defending himself from many of them. There were at least six creatures still alive at this point, and Hannibal was still only one person.

Will reached into the bag and withdrew a scalpel, tearing off the plastic wrapping to expose the blade. He hadn't ever tried to use something like this as a weapon, but he couldn't just sit and do nothing.

Will stood and walked towards where the creatures were converging on Hannibal. He didn't have to worry too much about being quiet now, as the creatures were being plenty loud themselves. He walked up to the one furthest from Hannibal and plunged the blade of the scalpel through its skull at the temple. He didn't know how these creatures worked, or if this attack would be effective against them, but he hoped the brain was still the center of control, so it would be good enough. He hadn't thought he would have the control and accuracy to pull off the spinal cord severance Hannibal had.

The creature dropped, and Will let out a breath of relief before he turned to the next one.

Hannibal was doing well for himself. He had already taken down three of them. The last two were attacking him at once, in some kind of joint effort. Will stepped forward and grabbed one by the long hair still attached to their decaying skull, giving a hard pull and yanking the creature's head back. The creature came with it, but only as the neck bent alarmingly far.

Hannibal's hand was caught in the thing's teeth, but it released him as Will pulled harder and there was an audible snap. The creature collapsed, and Will guessed he had broken the spine, though he wasn't sure it was dead.

Hannibal dispatched the last creature, and straightened his clothes. He gave the bite on his hand only a cursory glance before looking back to Will.

"Now that this unpleasantness has been dealt with, should we continue on our way?" he asked.

Will flexed his hand, feeling an ache from how tight he had been holding the scalpel. He wondered if he was infected now, if any of the virus or something could have gotten through the bandages and into the cuts on his hands. He wondered if he would become one of them.

Hannibal didn't seem concerned, which was reassuring.

“Yes,” Will said with a nod, hoping they were both going to be fine.

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Will was limping and exhausted by the time they finally reached the compound. Hannibal said a quick word to the guards and they were allowed through the gate. From the way people avoided coming too close to him, Will thought Hannibal must be of some great importance to the community of survivors.

He was more than just a doctor, then.

But Will was leaning on the man, nearly too weak to keep his footing. He didn’t care that everyone was staring at him like he was a monster on his own. He just wanted to fall into a bed.

He hoped they had beds here, and they’d let him use one.

“Lecter,” A voice called, and Will looked up, “what the hell have you drug up?”

Will could imagine *he* was what the hell. He didn’t have the energy to be offended. He was studying the woman who stood at the top of the stairs. She had her hands on her hips like a southern ma reprimanding a child, but her stature left no one wondering who was in charge. Will thought she could easily snap his spine if she wanted to. Probably with one hand.

Hannibal didn’t seem at all perturbed by either the threatening presence or the rude greeting.

“This is Will Graham,” he said, letting go of Will and making him stand on his own, “he is in need of food and rest. Once he has had both, I will tend to his medical needs, as they are not urgent.”

The woman pressed her lips together, clearly unimpressed. Regardless, she waved to some men who stepped forward and tried to lead Will away.

Will felt a spike of anxiety at the idea of leaving Hannibal, but when he looked at the man Hannibal gave him a reassuring smile.

“Go on, you will be taken care of,” Hannibal said warmly.

Will went with them, basically held up between two men as his legs gave out. He felt his entire body threatening to collapse, but he tried to stay awake.

He was out before his head hit the pillow.

They had actual beds, with pillows and blankets.

3

Chapter Summary

Will meets the boss

When Will woke up, he found Hannibal sitting by the bed. He was surprised by the man's presence, and further surprised by his own relief upon seeing him. Hannibal had been the first person he had met in this new world, and he had been kind. Will's mind had fixed on that, apparently, and it had imprinted. Like a duckling. That could prove inconvenient.

"Welcome back, Will," Hannibal said with a smile.

Will sat up, wincing at the sting in his hands and knees. He was sore, his body protesting the sudden exertion he had subjected it to after such a long period of inactivity. He was frustrated at the thought of having to work back up to his regular level of strength.

"You'd think I'd slept enough in the past two months, and I wouldn't need to sleep again for a while," Will joked, "but here I am, sleeping again. At least I woke up. It hasn't been another month now, has it?"

Hannibal's smile warmed, and he huffed a soft laugh.

"No, Will," he said, "It has been five hours. Seeing as you have been comatose, then put through quite a physical ordeal, that is relatively short for a period of rest."

Will smiled wryly, then noticed there was someone standing at the foot of his bed.

It was the woman.

Will shifted nervously, wincing slightly at the sting of his cuts as the movement agitated them. Her gaze was intense, as if she suspected him of something. Will was used to being disliked, but most people he worked with in the FBI didn't think he was competent enough to have done anything really bad. If he had to guess, Jack was the only person who understood he was capable, but he didn't know how dark Will's thoughts got so he wasn't worried about him doing anything.

"What can I help you with?" he asked, feeling his voice shrink and recede as if it was fleeing from her presence and abandoning him to her mercy.

The woman let Will stew in his own anxiety for a moment, the silence stretching out and making him sweat.

"How did you survive?" she asked.

Will gave Hannibal a questioning look. He had expected Hannibal to explain everything while he was asleep.

Hannibal just tipped his head toward the woman, in a gesture Will took as a bid to just tell the truth.

Will turned back to the woman, growing more nervous with every moment.

“I don’t know,” he said, shaking his head, “I don’t even remember how I ended up in the hospital in the first place. I was in a hurry, trying to get to work to tell my boss something important. I might have been in a wreck or something.”

The woman’s expression turned slightly condescending, and Will bristled at her judgment.

“What on earth could you have needed to tell your boss that was important enough to risk your life for?” she asked.

She thought he was reckless. She thought he had been driving dangerously, and the accident had been his fault. He should have expected that, though it still made him bristle with irritation. Even here, in this new world, people wanted to blame him for everything.

“That’s classified,” he said, mostly just to be contrary and hating the way it made him sound, “I work with the FBI, and barring the death of everyone involved, it’s still an ongoing investigation. An open case.”

Her expression flickered with self-doubt, and Will felt a glow of validation. Even here, the FBI had enough residual sway to make her question her doubts about him. He had a little bit of leverage.

“Before I answer any more of your questions, I’ll need you to answer one of mine,” he continued, wishing he had his badge just for the feeling of authority, “who the hell are you?”

A muscle at the woman’s jaw jumped, and Will wondered if she would answer him at all.

“Will,” Hannibal said carefully, drawing Will’s attention back to him, “this is Margot Verger. This is the Verger estate, which Margot has turned into quite a successful commune since the outbreak.”

Will nodded. The name rang a distant bell, and he looked back at the woman curiously.

“I knew your brother,” he said with a frown, noticing the way Margot tensed when he said it, “the FBI would have loved to get him behind bars. But he always had just the right connections. I bet he didn’t survive the outbreak though, did he?”

Will had the vague idea that Margot had killed him, or had made it possible for someone else to do it. She had seen the opportunity, with the zombie-creatures coming like a storm. He wouldn’t fault her for it.

Margot’s eyes flicked up to Hannibal, almost quick enough Will didn’t catch it. That was curious.

“No,” she agreed, “he didn’t. My brother is dead, and the entire estate is gone. All I have left is this.”

She swept her arm, gesturing to the room full of beds and the space of the compound beyond.

Will shrugged.

“You’re clearly capable, and I can’t imagine the world is worse off without Mason, though I would have liked to see if he survived prison.”

Margot nodded.

Will could see she was warming up to him, relaxing now she knew they shared an opinion of her brother.

“Were you bitten by any of those things?” Margot asked, and Will frowned.

“No, but I got all cut up. How does it spread?” he asked.

Margot smiled, a small and soft thing on her face, making it seem like a secret.

“Just through bites,” she said, “one of the first parts of the process they undergo is growing a kind of venom sack. Like a snake. At least as far as we’ve been able to tell. That’s the only way it spreads. You should be fine.”

Will furrowed his brow, glancing at Hannibal.

“How long does it take?” he asked.

Margot sat on the next bed over, apparently no longer suspicious of him.

“That varies. It’s something like rabies. Doctor Lecter actually thinks they might be related. But the point is that it can lay dormant. People can be carriers with no symptoms. It’s a dangerous game we’re playing every time we find someone new. But those have been growing fewer as time goes on.”

Will hated what he was about to do. The man had saved his life more than once. And they had only met the day before.

“Doctor Lecter was bitten,” he said, chewing on his lip.

Margot laughed softly.

“I’ll bet he was,” she said, unconcerned, “but you don’t have to worry about him. I have some things to do, so I’ll let you two talk this over yourselves.”

She stood and walked to the door, giving Hannibal an amused but stern glance as she passed him.

When she was gone, Will gave Hannibal an inquisitive look. To his relief, the man didn't appear upset with him for what he had done.

"Did you expect me to be angry with you? That I would conceal a potential threat of that nature?" he asked, though he sounded more amused than anything.

Will pulled part of his lower lip between his canines and pressed down until it hurt, glancing down at his hands in his lap.

"I dunno. I was afraid you would be. I'm not typically optimistic about how people are going to react to things I say." He wasn't about to add that he had seen plenty of zombie movies, and that was always the kind of thing that seemed to happen.

Hannibal hummed curiously, propping an elbow on the bed by Will's knee and resting his head on his hand.

"Is that due to your profession, or is there another aspect of the scenario that I am unaware of?" he asked.

"I'm not very… sociable," Will said carefully, "I make people uncomfortable, generally."

Hannibal considered that, studying Will like a particularly fascinating scientific specimen. Despite the intensity of his gaze, it felt warm and amused rather than cold and clinical. Will didn't mind it.

"Are you unkind?" Hannibal asked.

Will shook his head.

"No, no. I'm just blunt, I can be rude without meaning to, and," he paused, "I know more than I should."

Hannibal's interest was clearly piqued, and he sat up a bit straighter.

"How so?" He asked, and Will thought he might have the idea it had something to do with being in the FBI. Some kind of government surveillance. Probably the kind of thing people thought of in conjunction with the CIA.

Will smiled sheepishly.

"I'm a criminal profiler," he confessed, "and only a consultant. What I end up knowing has more to do with what they think than what they do."

Despite what would have been a disappointment to most people, Hannibal's eyes glittered with fascination.

And Will had a sudden, clear insight. The way he dressed, too formally for someone used to scrubs. The posture, as if he was comfortable in any situation and enjoyed leisure. The way he looked at people, Margot specifically.

Hannibal had been a psychiatrist more recently than he had been a medical doctor. He was interested in learning more about Will, because he understood the psychology angle. It also explained the kinds of questions he had asked. They were the kind psychiatrists liked to ask Will at first meeting. A foot in the door.

“And what might you know about me that may seem too much?” Hannibal asked.

Will hesitated, because when people asked that of him they usually ended up offended anyway. But he didn’t think Hannibal would.

“You were a surgeon, then a psychiatrist more recently,” he said, “You’re clearly not native to the states, and I want to say your accent is Baltic. Either Latvia or Lithuania would be my guess, but I can’t narrow it down further. That’s mostly just the easy stuff, though. I want to say you also had some kind of formal combat training, but I don’t know what style.”

Hannibal smiled, showing those sharp teeth again, and Will blinked.

“And you’re already infected. That’s why Margot wasn’t worried you were bitten. That’s why you were out on your own. You don’t have to worry about being bit because you already were.”

Hannibal’s smile widened, and his eyes glittered crimson.

“Correct on all counts,” he said, “I was born in Lithuania.”

Will just stared at him.

“If you’re infected, how come you aren’t sick? How come you’re considered safe to be around? Why do they all trust you?”

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh and took Will’s hand. The touch was startling, but Will didn’t pull his hand away.

“There are many things in this life we do not understand. I am working to find out how I came to be this way, at the same time as I am trying to learn a way to protect others from the disease. I have limited resources, and very few people who can help me, but I would like to learn how this works. I may even be able to cure myself.”

“Would you want to?”

Will hadn’t thought about that before asking. He hadn’t even known he was going to ask. It had just popped out of his mouth, and now he knew there was no taking it back. By the look in Hannibal’s eye, it had been a fair question.

“I shall cross that bridge when and if I come to it,” he said, “but for the time being, I think we have much to discuss.”

Will wasn’t sure what they might have to talk about, but he nodded.

“You said you worked with the FBI. If we can contact them, would you like us to? I believe they have their own base of operations, and we might try to reach them with a radio. If that is something you would like.”

Will thought about that. He thought of Jack, Beverly, Zeller and Price. He didn’t know what had become of them, but he wasn’t sure he wanted to. What if they were all dead or changed? Not only would that be devastating to his mental health, but if he let the FBI know he was still around, they might want to snatch him back up. He would have to work with all new people, and under these strange new conditions.

“Not yet,” Will said, wetting his lips nervously, “there’s something I want to do. No. I *need* to, I think. It might already be too late, but I have to know. If I go to the FBI with it, at least if they haven’t changed how they operate entirely, they’ll take forever to do anything. On my own, I might be able to do something about it.”

Hannibal smiled.

“Is it to do with what you were in such a hurry to speak with your boss about?” he asked.

Will nodded.

“I’m probably actually fine to tell you about it,” he admitted, “at least in this kind of situation. But I gave Margot a hard time because I didn’t like the way she was looking at me. I wanted her to take me seriously.”

Hannibal nodded, smiling.

“You did a wonderful job with her. I was greatly impressed. What is it then, that you did not tell her?”

Will flushed slightly, pleased to have impressed Hannibal. It had been a long time since anyone had genuinely complimented him or his work. Jack had just been progressively more demanding and frustrated with him. He was too sensitive to it.

“I know who the Minnesota Shrike is,” he said.

Hannibal raised his eyebrows.

“He has a daughter. She looks like all the dead girls. If we don’t get to him, she’ll be killed.”

Hannibal nodded, but he was frowning. Will thought he probably knew what news Hannibal thought he was about to have to break to him. Will would let him say his piece, but he knew already he wouldn’t be swayed.

“In all likelihood, they are both either dead, changed, or have fled,” Hannibal said regretfully.

Will shook his head.

“Not him. You don’t know him the way I do. He wouldn’t have gone down easy, and he lives out in the woods. He’s prepared for this kind of thing, but not because he was expecting it.

He was almost off the grid already, before this all happened. I don't know about his daughter, but he will still be there, and alive. If she's dead, I want justice. If she's alive, I want to save her."

Hannibal's fascinated smile was back. He didn't seem exasperated that Will hadn't changed his mind, nor did he seem at all upset that Will was disagreeing with him. He was just curious.

"Have you met them?" he asked, "you know them quite intimately."

Will shrugged. He didn't know if he would be able to convince Hannibal on this point, but he was going to have to get someone to at least support him in this decision, if not agree with him.

"I've been on his case for a while. I knew what he was like before I had a name for him. I knew just about everything about him but his name."

Hannibal nodded.

"Come with me," he said, standing suddenly and pulling Will up with him, "I imagine you are nearly starving."

Will was, so he followed.

4

Chapter Summary

Will isn't exactly making friends

“If you wish to leave the compound, especially for an errand as peculiar as this one, you will have to convince Margot to allow it,” Hannibal said, setting a plate of food in front of Will.

They were in Hannibal’s personal living space. Hannibal had explained that few had private spaces, but he had the advantage of no one wanting to live with him because of his unique nature. Will had a hard time really believing it, but he remembered the way Margot had kept her distance from him in the room with all the beds, and how the others had looked at Hannibal when they first arrived. Apparently, they didn’t trust him to be harmless.

The food was amazing, much better than anything Will would have expected in these circumstances. Part of that was due to Hannibal’s skill in the kitchen, but Will knew it also illustrated how well organized and governed the compound was. They weren’t doing too badly for themselves, all things considered.

“Alright,” he agreed, “how would you suggest I do that? Will I have to resort to blackmail?’

Hannibal huffed a laugh.

“I would be curious what you would hold over her head, having met as recently and briefly as you have,” he said.

Will considered it for a moment, deciding it wouldn’t hurt to tell him, even if he didn’t already know.

“She killed Mason,” he stated, “Or she orchestrated his death.”

Hannibal didn’t look surprised by what Will said, but he did look impressed that Will knew. Either she had told him, or he had guessed.

Or he had been involved.

Will shook that thought away.

“I fear that may only serve to get me into trouble,” Hannibal said, “she would likely believe I told you as much.”

Will hummed thoughtfully, taking a bite of the good food. That confirmed that Hannibal had already known about it, but it didn’t give Will the context. It probably didn’t matter all that

much.

“Then that won’t do. I guess I’ll have to defer to your judgment, then. What do you think I should do?” he asked.

Hannibal took his own bite of food, making Will wonder what kind of effects he had from the virus, and if it was progressing in him in any way. He didn’t appear to be rotting at all, but his lightning reflexes and strength did seem to be greater than that of any natural man. Had he only benefited from it? What a strange world it was if that was the case.

And what exactly were the regular effects? How long did the creatures live for? What were the first signs? Why did they decay? Will didn’t know half as much as he wanted to about what he was facing. He hoped Hannibal would know more, and be willing to discuss it with Will.

“I’m afraid I cannot offer you any advice in that vein, but I will do everything I can to help you convince her,” Hannibal said.

Will nodded. He supposed that was more than he could have asked for. At least he wasn’t completely alone in this.

—

“Hey, you’re the new guy.”

Will looked at the man addressing him, wincing slightly at both the way he had spoken and the fact that he had to look without any barrier. His glasses hadn’t been with him in the hospital room. He hadn’t complained about it, feeling it wasn’t a priority given the circumstances. He had just been suffering the eye contact.

“Yeah. That’s me,” he said dully.

The man nodded, smiling.

“Lecter brought you in, I hear. What was that like?”

Will wasn’t sure why he would ask that. Hannibal hadn’t struck him as a shut in or anything, and being a doctor would mean he was familiar with almost everyone here. It wasn’t as if no one could talk to him. Hannibal had even struck Will as relatively social. He supposed just about anyone was social when compared to himself.

But this man had called him Lecter. Not Hannibal, or even Doctor Lecter. Will thought that showed some level of animosity. This was another indication that the people here didn’t exactly like Hannibal, or maybe that they didn’t trust him to be safe.

In the time he had been here, nearly a week now, Will had noticed that Hannibal didn’t have a lot of callers. Will had been staying with Hannibal in his private quarters, by invitation, and only Margot ever seemed comfortable enough to stop by, but only for necessary information exchanges and very short conversations. People weren’t even comfortable talking about him,

unless it was entirely detached and professional like this. He wasn't Hannibal to these people. He was Doctor Lecter. The monster.

Was it only because he wasn't exactly human?

"He did," Will agreed carefully, "It was… strange. Apparently I was in a coma for a few months, so everything is strange to me right now. But Hannibal has been very helpful and gracious as a host."

There was something about this man Will didn't like. It was almost as if he was enjoying this apocalypse. He kept smiling.

"I'll bet things are strange for you. If you ever need anything, don't hesitate to ask," he said, holding out a hand for a shake, "I'm Matthew Brown."

Will tensed slightly and offered an apologetic smile. He thought this guy was just trying to be friendly, but Will just wasn't comfortable with him.

"I don't really touch people," he said, wincing at how it sounded, "It's not a germ thing. That would be ridiculous in this situation. I hope you don't mind."

Matthew dropped his hand, still smiling in that unnerving way.

"No worries," he said, "even if it was a germ thing, it would probably be smart in this kind of place."

Matthew was peering at Will, like he might do something interesting at any moment. Will winced at himself again when he realized he had done something else rude.

"My name's Will," he said, "Will Graham."

Matthew huffed a laugh, still grinning.

"Pleasure to meet you, Will," he said, "Lecter actually took you to his own place? His private quarters?"

Will hesitated. The way Matthew said it sounded as if he might suspect something untoward. Or, at the very least, he thought it strange. It seemed to be more than the fact that Hannibal didn't have guests often. It seemed like Matthew thought Hannibal had ulterior motives for being kind. Will had no interest in gossip, especially if it would reflect poorly on Hannibal. He still owed Hannibal his life. He needed to avoid making things worse if he could. So far, Hannibal hadn't asked anything from Will in return for his kindness, and Will didn't think he intended to.

For Will, that was rare. People always wanted something from him. Even Matthew, right now, clearly wanted something from Will.

Will let himself really look at Matthew, then, trying to get a picture of who he was. Who he had been before all of this.

Even though he could have gotten away with letting it grow out, considering everything, his hair was cropped short and his face was clean shaven. He was also well muscled, but he was wearing soft soled shoes, like a nurse or doctor would wear. He had good posture, but didn't square his shoulders to loom. He was holding a tray of food from the dining hall, but had kept one hand free rather than stabilize it with both. His questions were pointed and his gaze was intense, and Will had an idea of where this kind of behavior might have been learned.

"You used to work in a hospital," Will said with a frown, "Psychiatric ward, if not a full psychiatric hospital. Nurse or orderly. I wonder if you ever worked with Doctor Lecter."

Matthew's eyebrows shot up, and Will thought it was only his self-awareness that kept his mouth from dropping open. Perhaps he had only approached Will in order to find out something about Hannibal, and hadn't thought it could backfire in any way. If he had wanted to remain a mystery, he had chosen the wrong person to talk to.

"No," Matthew said, recovering slightly, though he now looked wary, "I never did. I worked at a psychiatric hospital."

Will nodded. Hannibal had been in an emergency room. He had mostly said that just to connect his comment to what Matthew had been trying to talk about. It had been a distraction, though it had also been him checking to see if his observations were correct. He had been in a coma for a while, but it looked like his mind was about as sharp as it had been before. That was a good sign.

"Do I just strike you as the nurse type?" Matthew asked, "Or did something give me away?"

Will shook his head.

"You strike me more as the type to join the military at nineteen, because you think it will be a glorified war game that gives you power over people. I guess you recognized that wasn't true and picked a career that gave you actual power. I can only hope you didn't take advantage of the vulnerable people you had charge of." Matthew had paled slightly as Will talked, and that smile had finally gone. "I'm a criminal profiler."

Matthew drew back a bit, as if spooked. Will thought he probably was, all things considered. He certainly hadn't been prepared for the intense psychoanalysis Will had just bombarded him with.

"It was nice to meet you, Will," Matthew said, and quickly made his retreat without another word.

Will sighed to himself. He really should have been trying to make friends here. The problem was that everyone seemed to either be afraid of him, possibly by association to Hannibal, or only wanted to press him for gossip about Hannibal. While Will knew why that probably was, he didn't fully understand it. In a situation like this, he would have thought that kind of judgment and prejudice would have been put aside in favor of survival. That didn't seem to be the case, and it was frustrating to him. He wouldn't change his opinion of Hannibal just to fit in. That had never been his style.

That was why Will had never really fit in anywhere. He didn't change his mind due to outside pressure. If Hannibal was a monster like they all seemed to think, Will would find out eventually. That would be the factor that determined his changing mind.

Will continued on his way out to the greenhouses, a place he had learned was usually quiet and peaceful. Usually, there weren't too many people out there. He could sit and think, surrounded by the soothing presence of growing plants.

Hopefully, he could think for a while, and let all these thoughts settle. He still needed to figure out how best to try convincing Margot to let him leave to find Hobbs and save his daughter.

5

Chapter Summary

Some deception may be necessary

"Absolutely not," Margot said, "I can't spare a crew to go with you, and I'm not sending you out on your own just to be slaughtered. These days, I can't afford to let people be suicidal. There aren't enough hands."

Will squared his shoulders. It was intimidating, facing her like this. She could easily break his spine with one hand, he was sure of it. She was larger than him, and had a ruthlessness in her bearing that told him she wouldn't hesitate to hurt him if he made her feel like she needed to. She had probably killed her brother, after all. One stranger who was causing her problems wouldn't so much as make her blink.

"I'll go alone," he said, "I don't need a crew, and I am an FBI agent. I will not be slaughtered. I'll come back once I ensure she's safe."

Margot shook her head.

"I won't give you a gun. You're still weak from being in a coma, and you have no way of knowing if that girl is still alive."

Will clenched his fists. He needed to be resolute, and calm. He couldn't let her know how intimidated he was by her, and how angry her refusal was making him.

"You can't keep me here," he said, "I'll contact the FBI and they'll come down on you hard."

He was bluffing hard, and it was possible Margot knew that. He had no idea if the FBI was still up and working, much less if they had power enough to come down on someone holding one teacher/consultant against their will.

But the key to winning on a bluff was refusing to fold.

Margot stared at Will. He didn't betray his thoughts or feelings, knowing exactly what tics or tells could reveal his hand. Part of being able to read people is being able to make yourself unreadable. If you were really good, you could fabricate a facade for people to read.

Will was very good.

Before Margot spoke again, Hannibal emerged from the shadowy corner of the room. Will hadn't known he was there, and the way Margot jumped told him neither had she. It was

curious that Hannibal had managed to startle her, when nothing else had seemed to so much as faze her. It gave credence to Will's theories about the general opinion of Hannibal.

Hannibal gave Will a smile and walked over, handing him a box. It was the size of a shoe box, and Will had an idea what was in it.

Opening the box, Will grinned at the sight of his wallet, glasses, and service weapon. He silently mourned the extra magazine that would have been in his car, and was now lost to him. He would need to find more ammunition soon, if he could convince Margot to let him leave here.

Will checked the gun, found it in perfect working order, and snapped the holster to his belt. He tossed the wallet to Margot, and hung the glasses from his shirt pocket.

"In case you doubt I'm really FBI," he told her, "and I *intend* to go."

Margot opened the wallet and studied the badge with a frown. Again, she didn't get the chance to speak, because Hannibal spoke first.

"I will go with him," Hannibal said, "In that case, you will neither lose people for a crew, nor send him to what you believe to be certain death. If no one else can, you know I am capable of ensuring his safety."

Margot frowned, but handed Will's wallet back. She was careful not to get too close to Hannibal, Will noticed. Even she didn't want to touch him. Will wondered if Hannibal felt upset or insulted at all by this behavior. He certainly didn't show his thoughts, which Will could appreciate. Letting people know you were hurt was a way to become a target.

Will thought Margot wanted to say no, still. She didn't want to lose a doctor, especially one that was as competent as Will thought Hannibal was. But she also didn't want to argue with Hannibal any more than she wanted to touch him. She probably also saw the potential to ease the population's general mood by removing two people that tended to make others nervous.

"Doctor Lecter, we can't afford that either," Margot said, but Will could see she was starting to bend. Possibly just to get Will out of there. He was making her uncomfortable. "You're not done with your research for the virus, and we don't have enough doctors to spare."

Hannibal nodded along as she spoke, likely having expected each and every word of it. But Will knew he would get his way. He just didn't understand why Hannibal would bother doing it for him.

"While I quite understand that, and I sympathize, the facts are that the people here are likely healthier than they were before, and certainly more safe. You do have enough doctors for what you are facing," Hannibal said calmly, "and, above all else, you cannot stop *me* ."

This last was said so seriously and low Will felt as if the temperature of the room had dropped by a degree or two. Hannibal was dangerous, and not a force to be messed with.

Margot sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose, a gesture familiar to Will, especially when dealing with Jack Crawford. He thought they might get along, if fate ever allowed them to meet. If nothing else, they could commiserate over having to deal with Will's stubbornness.

"If I allow this, you have to give me a plan," she said, clearly unhappy with herself for giving in, "Tell me how you plan to get wherever you're going, and how long you should be gone. You won't be able to take many supplies, but you should be able to handle that."

She was saying this all to Hannibal, as if this was a school trip and he was Will's chaperone. Will would have been upset by it, but he had always preferred to let someone else be the face of the operation. It put less pressure on him, and Hannibal seemed like the kind of person who thrived under pressure.

"That is entirely reasonable," Hannibal said, as if now he was the sycophant, "I will get back to you the moment we have a plan."

With that, Hannibal turned to Will, an expectant expression that was a bid for them to leave together.

Will felt compelled to thank Margot, but thought it would probably be better to wait until after she had approved of the plan. It was too early to kowtow. Instead, Will just nodded and followed Hannibal back out of Margot's office.

There was work to be done.

—

"Have you found what you were looking for?" Hannibal asked, unmistakably amused.

Will wasn't bothered by him. He was too self-satisfied. He just walked into Hannibal's living space, his arms laden with maps and charts. The library here on the compound was remarkably well stocked with resources, and he felt incredibly productive.

"Actually, yes," he said, setting his burden out on the table, "despite Matthew Brown's best efforts, people were willing to help me."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow.

"Matthew Brown," he mused, "I had not realized you had met."

Will shrugged, unfolding one of the maps and not even glancing at Hannibal. He wasn't really thinking about Matthew at all in that moment. He had bigger things in the works, and he doubted he would need to worry about Matthew at all for the next while. He was going to go find Abigail, and make sure she was either safe or avenged.

"Sure," he said, "I think I made quite the impression. He's not happy I didn't want to gossip about you. Look at this."

Will pointed at the map. This had been a cheap copy, so he had been allowed to draw on it and mark the path he intended to take on his way.

But he didn't intend to tell anyone how far he was going. This was a decoy. He just had to convince Hannibal. If Hannibal believed, Margot would believe. Will could get the go ahead, and deal with the real plan when it became unavoidable.

"I've done the math, and if we follow this highway, here, walking will only take us about eight days to get there. If we can find some wheels, we can get there in as little as one day, depending on road blocks or obstacles. I don't know much about road conditions, but I figure eight days both ways won't cause Margot too much grief."

Hannibal studied the map. His eyes were dancing with that amusement, and Will knew he noticed the disparity. Now the real work began.

"This route is not directed to Minnesota," Hannibal noted aloud, though it wasn't a question.

Will nodded.

"He has a cabin here, in Indiana. During the part of the year when this all started, that's where he would be with his family. I know him, and he wouldn't leave after the outbreak. He would have hunkered down and set to work surviving. He'll be there. And it's a good thing, too. Minnesota is basically halfway across the country."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, and Will wondered if he bought that, or was just playing along. Will felt he might have tried too hard to sell it, and Hannibal knew he was lying. If so, he had to work on damage control now.

"Indeed," he said, "Quite fortunate that our journey has been nearly halved. What is this route you have marked here?"

Will looked, and huffed a soft laugh. Maybe it was alright.

"That's following some rougher terrain. Stuff cars couldn't handle, but might cut down travel time if we're going by foot. Just in case the roads are unusable, or we can't find any cars that work. I don't expect us to use it, but I marked it in case."

Will gave Hannibal an obvious once over, pressing his lips together as if unimpressed. He was hoping to distract the man from the strangeness of the plan and the routes, and he hoped a little poking at his pride would do the trick without making him too upset.

"Can you handle rough terrain?" he asked, obviously doubtful with a hint of mockery, "you don't strike me as the hiking type. Maybe recent events have changed that, though."

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh and opened one of the other maps, studying the notes and routes Will had measured and marked.

"I believe you will be surprised," he said, "I have more experience than you expect."

Will honestly didn't doubt that. He hadn't really thought Hannibal would have a hard time with the terrain. They had hiked through the woods to get here, after all.

“Well, I hope this will satisfy Margot. I’ve also marked some towns along the way where we should be able to get supplies. If we’re walking, we’ll need to pack light and restock often.”

Hannibal nodded, refolding the map and setting it back down. He turned to Will, putting his hands into his pockets and smiling. It was as if nothing in the world was wrong, and he was having a pleasant conversation with a good friend. It gave Will pause, because he just really wasn’t used to anyone looking at him like that. People typically felt uncomfortable around him, and wanted to get away as quickly as possible.

Hannibal looked entirely at ease, and even maybe fond of Will.

“What was your impression of Matthew Brown?” Hannibal asked, “I am curious what your keen perception has revealed.”

Will felt himself flush a bit, remembering how he had frightened Matthew. He wasn’t sure he wanted Hannibal to know about that, but by the glint of amusement in his eye Will thought he already guessed as much.

“He’s not particularly fond of you,” Will said, “though I still can’t figure why. Clearly you don’t have any intention to hurt the people here. You could easily have done so by now if you did. Maybe he feels threatened in a less literal way, because you worked in similar fields. Whichever is the case, he really wanted me to say something about you he could use.”

Hannibal nodded.

“I have suspected he is the source of the rumors and general displeasure with me, though I could never quite seem to catch him or prove it. Thank you for confirming my suspicions,” he said, “though I expect you have now become a second target.”

Will nodded, leaning against the back of a couch, so he was facing Hannibal.

“Yeah. Half the people here won’t come near me now. Like I’m infectious. But they’ll talk to me, and tell me what I need. In that way, he did me a favor.”

Hannibal smiled.

“You are not fond of touch, just as you are averse to eye contact,” he surmised.

Will huffed softly and gave another shrug.

“From what I know about you, I bet you can make a pretty good guess as to why that is,” he said.

Will instantly regretted that. He never asked anyone to psychoanalyze him. He didn’t like people to get into his head, dig through his thoughts, and try to make sense of it all. No one ever did it properly, and they just left him feeling violated. He usually fought tooth and nail to avoid psychiatrists who would try to crack his head open for a peek. And here he was, inviting one in.

Hannibal, to his credit, remained silent for a long moment, just studying Will as he considered how to respond. Will actually thought he might refuse the offer, noticing Will's discomfort and choosing not to roll the dice.

The allure of Will's mind was too great, it seemed, because Hannibal did speak after a moment.

"I imagine what you see touches everything in your mind," Hannibal said softly, respectfully, "you already perceive so much of others, and such direct contact is overwhelming to your mind and senses. You are taking control of what you see, rather than allowing yourself to be battered by it all."

Will felt his flesh rise in goosebumps, and he was startled into meeting Hannibal's eyes.

Hannibal hadn't made it sound as if he was some broken thing, unable to defend himself against the sights and sounds of the real world. He hadn't made Will seem like something delicate and in need of protecting. Neither had he made Will appear monstrous and frightening, near corrupt. The way he said it made Will sound like a noble and strong person, even worth admiration.

Hannibal was looking at Will like something beautiful. The way people looked at paintings and sculptures in museums and galleries. Almost as an artist would look at a muse.

"Why did you offer to come with me?" Will blurted, uncomfortable with the sudden intimacy of the moment. He winced at his own awkwardness.

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh.

"I thought it the most sure way to convince Margot," he said, "and I thought it the most sure way to see you survive. I do not want you to die, Will."

Will frowned, his brow furrowing as he looked down at Hannibal's shoes.

"Why?" he asked, "I mean, if it's because you saved my life and you don't want that work to be wasted, I guess that makes sense. But I don't think that's all of it. Most people who've met me wouldn't care if I dropped off the face of the earth. Why don't you?"

Hannibal's smile was gone, and he had looked away from Will. It was a relief, and allowed Will to study Hannibal in turn. Hannibal looked genuinely displeased, further bewildering Will.

"You have been dealt an unjust hand by the universe," Hannibal said, and he sounded strangely genuine, "you are worthy of being respected and admired. Your intelligence is impressive, and your competence is amazing. Since you have emerged from your coma, you have adapted to this strange new world admirably. I see you as our modern day Cassandra, doomed to know the truth but never be believed."

Will frowned. He didn't understand why Hannibal thought that, or why that made him care. It didn't matter how smart someone was, if they weren't likable, people didn't like them. At

least in Will's experience. No one had ever liked being around him just because he was smart, or they thought he was. In fact, being able to see the things he did seemed to make people like him less, because they thought he was creepy.

Hannibal was different in a lot of ways, and Will wasn't sure they were all good.

For now, it didn't matter, because he was probably Will's only ticket to getting out of here to save Abigail Hobbs. He could figure Hannibal out later, when he wasn't as pressed to get his help.

"Let's hope I get a happier end than Cassandra did," Will said, shaking his head.

6

Chapter Summary

Making friends???

Chapter Notes

Side note: there are so many characters with names that start with M. It's like the writers of the show had an affinity for it or something. Drives me crazy sometimes. (it's probably all in my head)

"How are you settling in?"

Will looked up from his place on the floor and felt instant shame at being caught in such a position. The woman standing over him was wearing a wide brimmed hat and gardening gloves. She had a basket at her feet that held several hand gardening implements.

"Oh, uh, I guess as well as can be expected," Will said, wincing at his own awkwardness. He was surprised anyone would still approach him and try to talk to him. The way people had been acting toward him, one would think he had the plague. But she was being polite. "Haven't exactly been making friends, though."

The woman nodded and crouched down to prune some unhealthy growth from the cucumber vines that were just beginning to become large enough to be recognizable. Will had been sitting next to the plants, soaking in their fresh scent and warming himself in the sun.

"Matthew has a bee in his bonnet about you," she said, "during times like these, we should really try to avoid infighting."

Will shrugged, looking out the glass wall of the greenhouse, to the treeline. The Verger estate was like a military base in a lot of ways, and Will thought they were lucky to have it. He would be sorry to leave it behind, but he would come back if he could.

"It's hard to always remember what kind of times these are when I'm here," Will said, "there's a sense of calm, especially in the greenhouses."

Will studied the woman as he talked, then offered a small smile.

"You know what I mean."

The woman glanced up from her work and flashed a smile. She was pretty. Not stunningly beautiful, but plenty pretty on her own. She looked like someone who had been through a lot, but Will supposed everyone had been these days.

“I do,” she said, “that’s why I offered to work with the plants. It’s peaceful out here. I’m Molly.”

Will nodded, and this time he remembered to introduce himself.

“I’m Will. You probably knew that already, though.”

Molly nodded, returning to her work.

“You’ve been staying with Doctor Lecter. There are a lot of rumors going around about you.”

Will huffed softly.

“Yeah. Thanks to Mister Brown himself. But it didn’t stop you from talking to me.”

Molly shrugged

“Like I said, we should avoid infighting. And I didn’t go out of my way to find you. I just wasn’t about to give you the silent treatment because of what he said. If you didn’t want to talk to me, you didn’t have to.”

Will smiled.

“That’s the truth,” he said, “how did you end up here?”

Molly frowned, then, likely remembering the fear she had felt when the outbreak had happened here.

“My little guy begged to visit that museum nearby. We were lucky when shit hit the fan, and Margot took us in. We were some of the first. Been here since the beginning.”

Will considered that. He guessed her son was about ten years old, and she’d had him when she was young. There was a touch of sadness in her voice that told Will about the father. While they had been young, it hadn’t been a mistake. Molly had loved him, and they had been happy together. The father had died, and Will didn’t think it had been during the outbreak. The wound seemed too old and healed. A scar that she had learned to live with.

“It’s good that you didn’t have to fend for yourselves too long,” Will said, “what’s the kid’s name?”

Molly’s smile returned at that, and Will knew she really loved her son. She was a good person, and probably a good mother.

“Wally,” she said, “If you run into him, he might not be too warm to you. He takes a while, you know.”

Will nodded.

“I probably won’t have the time before I leave, but I’m sure he’s a bright kid. You seem like a good mom.”

Molly’s lips pressed together for a moment, and Will realized she had been listening to the gossip. While she hadn’t let it stop her from being friendly, she couldn’t help but think about what she had heard.

“Are you really FBI?” Molly asked, apparently unable to help it.

Will sighed.

“I was,” he said, “I don’t know if any of that counts anymore. I suppose Matthew told everyone that I know all your secrets or something.”

Molly flushed lightly, apparently caught. Because she had been listening to the rumors.

“Something like that,” she admitted, “but of course I don’t believe him. It’s silly to think that you would have been watching any of us, much less all of us. He just likes to fearmonger.”

Will nodded again. He could see that she wouldn’t ask, but she wanted to know. She wanted to know why Will had made Matthew unhappy, and if she had any reason to fear him. She wanted to know, but she was too polite to ask.

If Will told her, maybe she could quietly help soften the rumors. That might work to his advantage, so that people wouldn’t hate or fear him as much. They would probably still avoid him, which was fine by him. But they wouldn’t be as likely to run him off or kill him. He might be able to combat the spread of fear.

“He got that idea because I do have a way to find out things,” he said, “I was a criminal profiler, which means I studied behavior patterns. I can figure things out by observing.”

Molly looked up and studied Will for a moment. She didn’t look scared or nervous, but neither did she seem all that impressed. That was a refreshing change.

Will braced himself for the question. The one people almost always asked when they found out what he could do.

“That must make you fun at parties.”

Will laughed. He couldn’t help it. Molly was smart enough to know she didn’t want to ask him what he knew about her, and instead she had made light of it in order to put him more at ease. She was no doubt curious. Anyone would be. Even Hannibal had asked. But she was putting his comfort first.

“It gets old fast,” he told her, “but I was good at my job. It’s not all that helpful here, but it’s the one thing I’m good at.”

Molly smiled.

“Will, I’m sure you are competent at plenty of things. And if nothing else, you’re the first person to figure out how to get Matthew to leave you alone.”

Will hummed in agreement.

“I wasn’t fishing for validation, but I appreciate it regardless,” he said, “Either way, Matthew won’t be a problem for me for very much longer.”

Molly tipped her head curiously.

“I did want to ask where you’re going,” Molly said, “rumor is you plan to come back, but why would you leave in the first place?”

Will wet his lips, considering how he should answer that. Even Hannibal had been skeptical when Will had explained it, and he didn’t really fancy the idea of the rumors getting a hold of whatever he told Molly, warping and changing while he was gone until people believed whatever Matthew wanted them to. If that happened, by the time they got back he would be worse than a pariah. He might just be killed.

Margot probably wouldn’t let that happen. She liked Will enough that she wanted him to help run things when he got back. At least that was what she said. Will didn’t think she would fall victim to the gossip as easily as others did, but they would be gone for a long enough time for things to go wrong and, by that time, she would know that he had lied in order to manipulate her into agreeing to his plan. Things could change.

“Might be a fool’s errand,” Will said at length, “but I know about some people who need help, and I can’t get them out of my head.”

Molly made a soft, considering sound.

“Then, I guess you have to go,” she said, “If for no other reason than to put those thoughts to rest.”

Will smiled thankfully, pleased that she wasn’t trying to tell him how foolish he was or accusing him of just trying to be a hero.

The truth was that the wait was agony to Will. While he understood that plans and preparations had to be made, there was a pull in his gut, an urgency to act that wouldn’t settle. He needed to save her. Protect her. Kill anything that threatened her. He couldn’t explain it, and he knew he really shouldn’t try to tell anyone about it or else they would think he was crazy.

He had never met Abigail Hobbs, but his mind insisted on behaving as if she was all that mattered. Until she was safe, he couldn’t even think about anything else.

“I just pray there’s still something I can do to help,” Will said.

Molly shrugged, picking up her basket of produce and lifting to her feet again.

“Sometimes, all we can do is pray,” she said, “I’ll see you around, Will. I hope you have a safe journey.”

Will nodded his thanks and Molly walked out of the greenhouse, back towards the main house.

At least he had one friend other than Hannibal. One person who might be happy to see him return at the end of this.

—

“You have got to be kidding me,” Margot said, and Will bristled, “Sixteen days if you don’t run into any obstacles, and you can’t even guarantee there’s a purpose in going.”

Will didn’t let Hannibal try to argue, instead stepping forward and pointing at the map.

“Actually, I expect it’s sixteen days at most, because these roads I’ve marked usually have very little traffic and I expect we can get some motorcycles or dirt bikes and get there a lot faster. I calculated on our walking time, so you wouldn’t feel like I was trying to trick you. I’ve allowed time for stopping at each of these towns here for supplies, calculating how much we could realistically carry and how long it will last before we need to stop for more. If all else fails, this alternate route takes us mostly through forest and undeveloped land to avoid the areas where the zombies are, and still cuts down our time. I’ll say it again, I intend to go. This is just me asking for your blessing and your permission to return after I save the girl.”

Will could tell Hannibal found his speech amusing, and was impressed. What really mattered, though, was how Margot was reacting to his stubborn outburst.

Margot smiled, and shook her head.

“It’s been a while since anyone’s dared talk to me like that. We could really use someone like you here, Will. I’ll ask you to stay, because I mean that, but I’ll let you go because I believe you can actually do this. If you survive, you had better come back here and help us run this place.”

Will huffed a sigh of relief, and returned the smile.

“Thank you. I’ll be back in about twelve days.”

Margot laughed.

“Overconfidence could get you killed, Will,” she admonished, “But hopefully Doctor Lecter will keep you humble.”

Will grinned, and turned to face Hannibal. Hannibal was looking back at him with some fierce appreciation that Will couldn’t quite decipher. It was somewhat frightening, but Will couldn’t allow himself to feel daunted by anything right now. Not with his goal so close. He couldn’t let either of them start to question whether or not he could handle this. He needed to get out of here, and be on his way to stop Hobbs from hurting his daughter.

“I will do whatever I must to help Will on his journey,” Hannibal said, and grinned with his sharp teeth. Will could have sworn his eyes flashed red, and that made him wonder if maybe he shouldn’t trust Hannibal as much as he did.

Margot nodded decisively.

“Then you two go get ready to leave. I have some things to set up, and we need to delegate the hospital while Doctor Lecter’s gone. I trust you can handle yourselves. You can leave first thing tomorrow, to give yourselves the most daylight to start.”

Will nodded, and Margot headed for the door. Hannibal gestured for Will to go before him, and they all headed out. Margot was off immediately, clearly on a mission. Will wondered if she ever had time to relax. Considering this was basically the apocalypse, he thought she might not.

How long would she last like that?

“Shall we prepare to leave?” Hannibal asked, like a proper dandy gentleman.

Will couldn’t help smiling at the image that conjured. If they hadn’t both been thrown into these circumstances, he couldn’t imagine any situation where they would chance to meet, much less get along the way they were. They would probably hate each other.

“Yeah. Let’s get ready to go.”

7

Chapter Summary

Will is getting ready to leave, and his mind isn't being quiet.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Are there any items you would like specifically to have when we leave?" Hannibal asked while Will stuffed a backpack with all his maps and charts.

Will huffed.

"Sure as shit there are things I'd like to have right from the start," he said, "but I figure we can pick stuff up along the way, and I don't want to make people here be short on anything while we're gone. Margot's already doing me a favor by even allowing us both to leave in the first place. Not to mention, everything I pack is something I have to carry. I should be careful not to make it too heavy."

Hannibal hummed, carefully folding a few things and placing them in his own bag.

"You are far too considerate of people who you do not know, and some of whom have shown you hostility. Margot herself has not been exactly accommodating, despite the fact that she seems to like you. You should be taking whatever you are allowed and running with it. Even leaving without intent to return. No one here would fault you for wanting to find your own way. Most certainly not myself."

Will huffed bitterly.

"And here I thought you were an optimistic philanthropist. Because clearly you don't need these people, but they sure as *Hell* need you. I almost think Margot would have been more willing to let me go if you *hadn't* offered to come with me. She clearly wants you back as soon as possible. Are you just that good of a doctor, or is it because she can send you off on runs by yourself without having to worry about you dying?"

Hannibal laughed, and Will thought he seemed surprised.

"I see you are not to be trifled with, Will," Hannibal said, and he sounded pleased, "I think we will work well together. Tell me what items you would like, and I will see if there are spares we may take."

Will frowned, honestly a little doubtful. It seemed like Hannibal was entirely self-serving, despite how much he had been helping the people here. He had an angle, and Will didn't

know what it was yet. He didn't know why Hannibal was helping him. Additionally, Hannibal had deflected from addressing Will's comments about Margot and his question, and Will had an idea he had no intention to do so.

But surely it wouldn't hurt, and Margot wouldn't allow him to take anything that they couldn't afford.

"Alright," Will said, pulling over a piece of paper and a pen that were sitting on the table nearby, "I'll write down a couple things as I think of them. If we want to leave tomorrow, then we just have today and the morning to gather them. If they can't be spared, we can just pick them up the next time we come to a town that has them."

Hannibal didn't reply, apparently satisfied with that. Will really wondered what his deal was. Why was he invested in Will's plan, and what did he expect to gain out of it?

Will jotted down a couple of items before returning to his own bag, though he recognized he had fewer items that belonged to him. He supposed he would pack essentials in his bag, and Hannibal could pack whatever clothes he wanted. Will hoped he wouldn't try to bring several suits. That would make Will seriously consider just ditching him the first chance he got.

He might have to ditch Hannibal eventually, when it became clear he had lied to Margot about how far they were going, and how long they would be gone. Will figured Hannibal would probably want to come back here, where he could have all the fresh food and rest that he wanted. For all Will knew, Hannibal might even have agreed to this with the sole intention of killing him before they had been out for a day, and returning with the sob story.

Actually, he doubted that more than any other possibility. If Hannibal wanted to kill Will, he wouldn't feel bad about it, and he wouldn't need anyone's sympathy. And he would probably have just let Will leave on his own, expecting the zombies to do the job.

Will really wasn't having much luck figuring out his motivations.

"And you called me an optimist," Hannibal teased, his expression oddly warm, all things considered, "you truly expect us to live to see the next town on the way."

Will chuffed.

"When I'm not entirely disoriented by having just woken up from a coma to find myself in the middle of the goddamn apocalypse, I happen to be fairly capable of handling myself," he said, "I really am an FBI agent, if you'll remember. As long as we can find some more ammunition for my gun, I'll be able to get myself back into fighting shape soon enough."

Hannibal nodded, considering that and giving Will an obvious once over. His attention made Will slightly uncomfortable, but not in the same way most people did. He didn't seem to be unnerved by Will in the slightest, and didn't have any negative feelings towards him. He was just endlessly curious and found Will fascinating for some reason. But he wasn't trying to pry into Will's head the way other psychiatrists had.

"I need to go look for something," Will said, setting down his things and heading to the door.

Hannibal looked up curiously.

“Would you like me to come with you?” he asked.

Will shook his head.

“Nah. I’ve got this. Having you with me probably wouldn’t help all that much. You make people nervous.”

Hannibal huffed.

“You have confessed they hardly tend to like you much more,” he pointed out.

Will stuck his tongue out at Hannibal, and headed out. He was grinning when he got to the library again, and when Matthew saw him he raised a curious eyebrow.

“You just coming from Lecter’s?” he asked, “if so, I can’t imagine what you have to be smiling about.”

Will scrunched his nose and shook his head. Matthew’s weird aversion to Hannibal still didn’t make sense.

“Nothing,” he said, “I just need a couple more resources. Charts and things.”

Matthew nodded his head in the direction Will already knew to look.

“Sure. Do you need any help finding anything?” he asked.

“No,” Will said, “but thank you.”

Matthew watched as Will made his way through the shelves. Will tried to ignore his lingering gaze as he looked at the stacks of information.

This was really an impressive collection of resources, considering the circumstances. Margot knew what she was about, and hadn’t wasted time on things that didn’t matter. She made a very good leader in times of crisis, and Will was glad she was here. He thought he might not mind helping her out once everything with Hobbs was cleared up, so long as she still wanted him to. He thought they would probably get along just fine.

Matthew eventually walked away, freeing Will from his uncomfortable staring. Will sighed his relief and found what he was looking for. He didn’t really expect to need this one, but he wanted to be prepared in the event he did. If Hannibal found out about his plans, and decided to try to stop him, Will wanted to have this in case.

He hoped Hannibal would agree to either go with him all the way, or at least allow him to go on alone. He didn’t doubt Hannibal could easily kill him, and he didn’t really want to find out.

He could worry about that again in the morning. For now, he had to finish his first set of preparations and try to sleep through the night so he would be fresh when they started off.

His only problem was that he was staying with Hannibal, in his personal quarters.

It wasn't as if Hannibal had done anything to make him particularly uncomfortable with him. It was just that Will had so many questions about the man, and why no one other than Margot seemed to like him. He was anxious about the trip as well, so he doubted his mind would allow him any real rest.

"You're Will Graham."

Will looked down, realizing there was a kid sitting in a gap between shelves, a sports magazine laying across his thighs and a baseball cap backward on his head. He looked to be small for his age, but Will guessed he was around ten, and he wondered if this might be Wally, the boy Molly had spoken of.

"Yeah," Will said, racking his brain for the correct ways to interact with a child. He didn't really want to make a bad impression, even if it didn't mean much. "I guess everyone's heard of me."

The kid nodded, his expression not shifting. Will couldn't help but smile, remembering how he had been a somber kid like that, so serious and quiet. Adults had thought he was mature, and other kids thought he was freaky. When he got older, he realized the other kids had been right, and the adults had just made things worse.

"My mom says you're nice, but weird."

Will huffed a laugh.

"I'm guessing you're Molly's kid. She said you're named Wally. You like baseball?"

Wally nodded, and a ghost of a smile touched his expression. It was the same, sad kind of smile that Molly had worn, and Will could suddenly see a resemblance to her. This was definitely her kid.

"Yeah. My dad loved baseball. You're leaving tomorrow. Everyone says you're crazy and that you're going to die."

Will nodded, amused by the boy's dry tone and blunt attitude.

"I am leaving," Will said, "but Hannibal's going with me, and I know how to keep myself alive. I grew up having to fend for myself, and I'm part of the FBI. I think I'll be fine."

Wally studied Will with a surprisingly shrewd expression. Will wondered if all kids that had survived the outbreak were going to be like this. Cynical and practical. He hoped not, but he wasn't delusional enough to expect the best.

The world was hell, now, and things were going to be bad for a long time. If they ever got better.

"I guess we'll find out," Wally said, "but I hope you come back. Mom says she thinks you're lonely. She also thinks you're smart."

Will was flattered, at the same time as he thought Molly might be embarrassed if she knew her son was telling him this. Kids were funny that way, so often smart enough to know what not to say, but also mischievous enough to say more than they should anyway out of sheer curiosity.

“Well, I hope she’s right about me being smart,” Will said, “I’m gonna have to be to get back here alive. I’ll try to bring back some good stories, at the very least.”

Wally nodded, seeming uninterested. He turned back to his magazine and Will guessed they were done talking. That was fine. He felt like he at least hadn’t made the kid hate him. That was good.

—

Will jolted awake, panting and covered in sweat. He had dreamed of Hobbs and his daughter.

Abigail Hobbs had been frightened, cowering as her father advanced. He had been holding out a severed arm, trying to get her to eat it. She had been crying. Hobbs’ eyes had flashed red.

Then, he had lunged. And Will had woken up.

Will cursed softly and slid his legs out of the bed. He was sure he wouldn’t get any more sleep tonight.

Will padded over to where the sink was, getting himself a glass of water.

Hold on a little longer, Abigail , Will thought. *We’re coming for you.*

Will turned around with his glass and nearly dropped it on the floor when he saw Hannibal standing there, backlit by moonlight and his eyes shining red.

“I apologize for startling you,” Hannibal said, “ I heard you get up. I am unused to anyone else being in my quarters at night.”

Will huffed and nodded.

“Makes sense,” he said, “Sorry for waking you.”

Hannibal tipped his head, studying Will curiously.

“I do not need much sleep these days,” he said, “but you should get as much rest as possible before we leave in the morning.”

Will nodded again, taking a long drink of his water.

“Guess my coma didn’t cure me of nightmares,” he said wryly, “I’ve always had a hard time sleeping through the night.”

Hannibal considered that for a moment before he opened one of the cupboards and produced a small bottle of pills.

“These may help,” he offered, “you will sleep through the rest of the night, and have no dreams. It would not be wise to take them after we leave, but it may help us start on the best foot.”

Will chewed his lip, wondering if it would really help. A part of him was afraid of going to sleep unnaturally, after the coma, but he did want to be rested for the start of their journey, and the idea of not dreaming was tempting.

“Alright,” he conceded, “but just this once. I’ve never liked the idea of becoming dependent on drugs to sleep.”

Hannibal nodded and tipped a couple of pills into his hand. He was smiling, and that made Will curious.

“You are in no danger of that for tonight,” Hannibal said, “I am pleased you trust me.”

Will frowned.

“Why wouldn’t I?” he asked.

Hannibal gave Will the pills and put the bottle away.

“Many people here will not allow me to give them medications, if they allow me to treat them at all. I had worried you would do the same, now that you know of my nature and have had the chance to be influenced by the others.”

Will dry swallowed the pills, forgetting for a moment that he was holding a glass of water.

“That’s stupid of them,” he said, “Seems like competent help is hard to come by right now. They should be grateful for what they can get.”

Hannibal smiled again, offering a light shrug.

“One cannot convince someone they are wrong on matters like this very often,” he said, “but perhaps now you see why I might be eager to get away for a time.”

That actually made sense. Hannibal was tired of being the one person everyone here distrusted, and he wanted to have an escape. He probably wanted company, or else he would have left this commune a while back and struck out on his own. He might even be invested in seeing that Will survived, since he was the first person to treat him like he wasn’t different.

“Alright,” Will said, “I guess that makes us friends, then.”

Hannibal continued to smile, seeming pleased by that, and Will got the idea he really had been lonely in the time since he had become infected. He was polite and sociable, and probably hadn’t been used to being an outcast. While he was hiding it admirably, he was hurting. He needed a friend.

Will went back to the bed and laid down, feeling drowsy despite the tacky feeling of his dried sweat. The pills must have already been working.

Hannibal sat in a chair beside the bed, watching Will with his shining red eyes.

“You just gonna watch me sleep?” Will asked, a little uncomfortable with the idea.

Hannibal shook his head.

“I will leave shortly after you fall asleep,” he said, “I just want to listen to your breathing for a minute.”

Will closed his eyes, deciding that wasn’t the strangest thing. Someone like Hannibal might have been married before all this happened, or at least had a partner. He might not be used to being completely alone at night. He might find comfort in the sound of another person.

And Will couldn’t deny that the idea of not being alone was of some comfort to him as well. He felt comfortable with Hannibal, and his presence soothed his frayed nerves.

“Okay,” Will murmured, beginning to drift.

Hannibal’s hands pulled the blanket over Will’s bare legs.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone ready for Hannibal to be a little bit creepy? I sure hope so. See you next chapter. <3

8

Chapter Summary

Hannibal is a creep, and Will wants to know more about him.

Hannibal waited a few more minutes to be sure Will was truly, deeply asleep. It wouldn't be a simple task to explain himself if Will were to awake while he was still here.

Hannibal carefully felt Will's pulse, feeling the slow beat of his heart through his veins and arteries. He was surely asleep, and wouldn't be roused easily.

Hannibal lifted Will's wrist to his nose and breathed in deeply, awash in the vibrant scents of life and feeling. Will smelled like fresh cut yarrow and cinnamon, earthy and alive. There were hints of rain and electricity, like the air after a lightning strike, and everything was slightly stronger with the sweat he had woken up with. Hannibal was pleased he hadn't washed it off before returning to bed.

There was something special about Will. He wasn't like Hannibal, at least not yet, but he wasn't like the people here either. He could see more, certainly. That had been known to Will himself before all of this had happened. It was known to the FBI even. That wasn't what Hannibal was most curious about.

He had caught a glimpse of something darker in Will when they had been attacked in the woods on their way to the commune. When Will had broken the neck of the infected, his eyes had been dark and cold, but not detached. Will had been entirely present in that moment, and had enjoyed the violence. He had dispatched two of the infected, despite his physical disadvantage from having been in a coma. He had some inner darkness, like Hannibal's.

Hannibal wanted Will to belong to him. He didn't want these people to have him in any way, and didn't want anyone else to take up any space in his head. He was beautiful, and Hannibal had hopes that Will could become like him. Stronger.

Hannibal skimmed his hand up Will's arm, feeling the muscles there that had begun to atrophy during the coma, but were still firm enough to show that the man had taken good care of his body before everything had happened, and he had begun to build them back in the time he had been in the commune. He was strong. Hannibal brought his hand across Will's chest, over the thin material of the T-shirt he had worn to bed. The fabric was still a bit damp from his sweat, making the shirt slightly translucent to Hannibal's enhanced night vision.

Hannibal's teeth ached with the desire to bite through Will's flesh, taste his blood. He was sure Will would taste divine, going off his scent.

But Will wasn't for eating. At least not yet. Hannibal would wait and watch. He would prepare Will to become like him. If it turned out he couldn't handle it, or wouldn't accept Hannibal, then he would have to die. Until then, Hannibal would have to hide his true intentions.

Will shifted in his sleep, turning his head toward Hannibal, and a dark curl fell over his brow, tickling his nose so it scrunched in reaction. Hannibal couldn't help but smile at the sight, finding it endearing. Yes, Will was beautiful.

Hannibal resolved to pack his sketchbook and pencils, despite how it could be seen as a waste of cargo space. He wanted to draw Will a few times before he was forced to kill him, if that was how this ended.

Hannibal expected he would have plenty of time to follow through with his plan during their trip. He knew very well that Will had lied to both him and Margot about their destination. He had nearly halved it in order to get approval. They would be gone for quite a long time, and it would be just Hannibal and Will. Hannibal would be the only personality Will's empathy could reflect, and absorb. He would have perfect influence over the other man, and all the time in the world to get to know him.

Hannibal brushed the lock of hair out of Will's face, allowing himself to stroke over the short beard there, relishing the rough feel of the hairs under his palm.

It was not lost on Hannibal that he was greatly affected by Will's lack of prejudice against him. He was grateful Will continued to view him as just another person, rather than a monster. In fact, Will seemed to prefer his company over the others here at the commune. That was unusual, and made Hannibal want him all the more. Will had likely recognized this side to Hannibal's behavior, and contributed his decision to help him entirely to his desire to not be alone. Hannibal would allow him to think so for some time yet. Until Will could be given the entire truth.

Hannibal ran his hands through Will's hair, humming to himself in pleasure at the thickness and length. He really did find Will beautiful, and hoped dearly he would not be made to kill the man.

Hannibal had been surprised by the lance of jealousy he had felt when he had seen Will speaking with Molly in the greenhouse. Molly was a pleasant and polite person, down to earth and realistic. It made sense that Will would like her, especially because she would not be daunted by the rumors Matthew had been spreading. On the surface, Molly and Will seemed very similar. But Hannibal knew better. He knew he was a much better fit for Will in every way that mattered. It would be good for them to leave, removing all distractions from Will so he could focus on Hannibal.

At length, Hannibal pulled away, sighing softly at himself.

It had been impulsive to offer the drugs to Will to help him sleep. Hannibal honestly hadn't expected Will to agree. He was in a strange place, with a strange man who he knew was at least partially a monster. It was foolish. But Will trusted him enough it had only taken a moment of deliberation before he had taken the medication.

And had given Hannibal this opportunity to explore him just a bit.

Hannibal stood up and returned to his own bedroom, considering what the future may hold for him.

He had never wanted a companion, honestly. Not until he had seen the potential for one in Will.

If Hannibal was right about what had given him the ability to become this, rather than a mindless corpse, he would happily do it to Will in return.

After all, it was a simple matter of diet.

—

Will woke up when the sun shone in his face, and he found that the blanket had been pulled up to his shoulders while he had been sleeping. It was bizarre, imagining Hannibal tucking him in like a child. But, he supposed it wasn't that strange, really. If Hannibal was as lonely as Will was beginning to think he was, small, kind gestures like that would make sense.

It was just weird to be on the receiving end of things like that.

Will rolled out of bed and grabbed the clothes he had set out for himself the night before. He had been lucky they had a bunch of spare clothes waiting to be taken when they were needed. They really were well prepared here, and Margot was doing a wonderful job.

Will went into the attached bathroom and splashed water on his face.

He would be happy enough to return here once he found Abigail Hobbs. Maybe he would be able to get people to stop treating him like he was a carrier of a disease. If he just had some time, maybe he could fit in here. Margot wanted him to help, and he would try.

But he had to find Abigail first, and most likely kill her dad. It wasn't as if he could arrest him. At the very least, he could get Abigail away from him. If her mom was still alive, they could take her away as well. It all depended.

Will changed quickly, running a hand through his hair in an attempt to make it not look like a terrible rats nest. He doubted he was going to look very good for a while yet, seeing how gaunt and weak he looked. It was no wonder Margot expected him to die out there, the way he looked. Even after a week of eating better and trying to exercise, he still looked like a stiff breeze could knock him over.

But, he was going, and he would make it to Minnesota to save Abigail Hobbs. If he didn't make it back, it didn't matter. He just wanted her to have a good shot at surviving. She deserved to live. Even if this was the world she would be living in now. She didn't deserve to die at the hands of her father, or live with fear in his grasp. She deserved to have choices and freedom. To do what she wanted without his shadow over her.

Will closed his eyes and breathed, trying to clear his thoughts.

Right now, he just needed to focus on getting on the road. He would have plenty of time to think of his hopes and dreams for the girl he was saving later. He had to focus on getting there.

Will opened the door to the bathroom and nearly ran right into Hannibal, who was standing on the other side.

“Oh God, sorry,” Will said, tensing and putting a little distance between them, “I probably should have waited for you to go first. This is your place. Sorry. I just-”

“Will,” Hannibal said, smiling as he interrupted Will’s ramble, “you have done nothing wrong. I apologize for startling you again. As I have said, I am unaccustomed to another in my space. Is there anything in particular you would like for breakfast?”

Will flushed. Neither of them was used to this, and he was reeling from the simple offer to let him request a food for breakfast.

And all at once, he was craving something nostalgic.

“I- uh, well. I don’t suppose you could make biscuits and gravy?” he asked shyly, “I know it’s not exactly health food, and you’re careful about what you eat. It’s probably stupid, but-”

“Will,” Hannibal said, interrupting him again, “I am familiar with the food you are requesting, and seeing as we are likely to be getting quite a bit of exercise in the next while, I think it is perfectly excusable. I would be happy to make it for you.”

Will ducked his head, letting his hair fall in front of his face. He couldn’t help smiling, and he was sure he was a blushing mess. He just wasn’t used to anyone doing something like that for him. He wasn’t used to anyone taking care of him.

“Alright,” he said softly, “thank you.”

Hannibal stepped out of the way, letting Will step out of the bathroom and get past him. Will tried so hard not to make this whole thing awkward. He was sure he was failing, but Hannibal had the good grace not to say anything about it.

Once Will was alone again, he let out a long breath and rubbed his hands over his face.

He needed to stop being so weird. If only he had ever been able to manage that.

Will checked his bag again, sure he was going to forget something. Not that it mattered. He would be able to get more supplies at a town down the road most likely, if Hannibal didn’t have whatever he might have forgotten. Will had an idea Hannibal was always prepared, so it probably wasn’t even worth worrying about.

That wouldn’t stop him from worrying.

Eventually, Hannibal emerged again, dressed with his hair combed and looking perfectly presentable. He wasn’t wearing a three piece suit today, though. Instead, he was wearing a sweater and slacks, still more formal than Will’s casual, but looking much more like he was

prepared for a trip. That put Will a little at ease, knowing Hannibal wasn't so pretentious he couldn't give up his formal habits for this kind of excursion.

"Do you have a specific recipe in mind, or am I welcome to take a few liberties with breakfast?" Hannibal asked, a teasing glint in his eyes that almost made Will flush all over again.

"You're a great cook," Will said, "I trust you."

Hannibal was pleased by that, and immediately began to prepare the food. His movements were so fluid and easy, as if he was perfectly comfortable with himself. Will envied it. He was sure he had never moved like that. He never felt that confident in his own movements.

That wasn't entirely true. When Will didn't allow himself to think about what he was doing, he wasn't awkward. Like when he had killed those zombies in the woods.

But that had been a fluke. It had been adrenaline. Hannibal was like this all the time, and hadn't even seemed to be all that affected by being attacked. He just moved that way all the time, as if he had been trained to move through the world like it was made for him.

"Do you dance?" Will asked.

Hannibal paused, looking up at Will curiously.

"I am curious why you would ask that," he said, "I am sure it is because of some observation you have made, but I am not sure what it is."

Will shrugged.

"You have great kinesthesia," he said, "you move fluidly, the way dancers do. You're confident that you know exactly where each part of your body is, and you're not afraid of bumping into things. And you *don't* bump into things. You're just really, uh, graceful, I guess."

Hannibal smiled.

"I see. As it happens, yes. I do enjoy dancing, though I have not had much opportunity for such things in the past while. I imagine my combat training contributes to what you noticed, though they would show differently. I am again impressed by your perception."

Will smiled, glad Hannibal didn't seem to feel he had been weird about that. Maybe they were just both weird, in ways that matched well enough they could get along. That would be incredibly lucky.

"So you do have combat training," he said, "I don't suppose you're going to tell me about that, are you?"

Hannibal huffed a laugh, sliding a pan of biscuits into the oven and then turning to the stove to make the gravy.

“It was not formal in any way,” he said, “as I am sure yours was, in order to be an agent of the FBI. My aunt taught me to fight when I was young. When she realized I had no intention of staying out of trouble, she determined to make sure I could come out the other side relatively unharmed.”

Will considered that.

Will was starting to wonder about Hannibal’s family. The way his voice had barely changed when he spoke of his aunt made him think it was likely she had not been in his life for a long time, but may still be alive. Estranged, maybe. They had been close, obviously, if she had taught him to fight, but they had grown apart and lost contact. But what about the rest of Hannibal’s family? Did he have siblings? Where had his parents ended up? What had his relationship with them been like?

Maybe Will was feeling massively understimulated, because he usually wasn’t this curious about other people’s lives. And usually he could figure these things out without having to ask. Hannibal was harder to read. That made it easier to be around him, but a little off-putting as well, because he couldn’t entirely predict or see through him. It made Will really curious.

Curiosity about Hannibal right now was dangerous. Will recognized that. He was trying to lie to Hannibal, get him to help until he found out the truth. If Will got too wrapped up in who Hannibal was, he would have a harder time lying, and it would be harder to leave Hannibal when he found out about the lies. It was a terrible time to be curious about someone like Hannibal.

But his mind was prodding at this curiosity the way a tongue poked at a sore or an empty socket where a tooth had once been. It wouldn’t let up, and Will knew he wasn’t about to get free of it anytime soon. He would just have to be careful what he let Hannibal see.

“You don’t present to most as a trouble child,” Will said amiably, “I bet everyone who’s met you thinks you were the teacher’s pet type, suckup and a snitch. Vying for the approval of all the adults in your life and careful never to step out of bounds.”

Hannibal glanced at him with a raised eyebrow.

“Indeed,” he mused, “but you see differently? Is that merely because I have confessed to getting into trouble?”

Will shook his head.

“I could have guessed before,” he admitted, “usually, people who were goody two shoes’ when they were younger find it easier to embrace their weirdness as an adult, channeling the skills they learned in order to please the adults into new avenues, sewing wild clothes for themselves, writing outlandish fiction, using all the language they had never been allowed when they were younger. They rebel against their childhood, because they finally have the freedom to govern themselves. Kids who got into trouble a lot have an easier time falling into patterns and following rules, because they aren’t repressed. They compartmentalize better, behaving as they should in whatever given circumstance, while still being genuine to themselves. And they have better senses of humor, in my opinion.”

Hannibal laughed softly.

“Trouble children are chameleons, while perfect children are flamingos,” he mused, “what a curious mind you have, Will Graham. I suppose there is a compliment in there somewhere to be had, though I find it all so amusing I don’t even care to look. As it so happens, I was somewhat both. I did well in school, and appealed to the authority figures in my life whom I respected, as well as the others my age whom I respected or liked. It was with those who were distasteful I had an issue, often fighting whether it be verbally or physically. I had no qualms insulting a teacher who was impolite, or a fellow student who was discourteous. Status had very little to do with it.”

Will grinned. He liked that, and he had been much the same way as a kid, though people hadn’t liked him much even if he was nice to them.

“That sounds about right,” he said, “so you have camouflage, but you are unrepentantly yourself all the same.”

Hannibal’s eyes sparkled when he glanced up at Will, this time. He found that particularly funny.

“Like a tiger,” he said.

9

Chapter Summary

Off they go

"This is your last chance to back out," Margot told Will seriously, looming over him and making him feel slightly threatened. He knew she didn't mean him any harm, but the mere fact that she could probably crack his skull like a walnut in her hand made it really hard to believe that.

Will offered a wry smile.

"I need to know for sure, and do what I can if there's still time," he told her, "but thank you for all your help, and I hope to see you again."

Margot nodded, then waved for the gate to be opened. Hannibal was there, with Will, and they left. There was little fanfare aside from the curt salute Margot gave them as they left, but that was fine by Will. He didn't want this to be a big deal.

They walked for a ways without talking, Will so lost in thought that he hardly noticed the silence. Eventually, Hannibal spoke up.

"Have you ever ridden a motorcycle, Will?" he asked.

Will glanced up, torn from his thoughts so suddenly it jarred him and took him a moment to register what had been said and why.

"Huh? Oh. Uh, no. I haven't, but I figure it shouldn't be too hard. I'm glad Margot didn't ask that, or I'm sure she would have been a lot more skeptical about this all. Not that it would have stopped me."

Hannibal smiled, amused.

"I have no doubt you would have lied convincingly enough to have gotten to this point. You are quite determined."

Will furrowed his brow, sensing there was something Hannibal meant to say.

"Have *you* ridden a motorcycle?" he asked, not entirely discounting the idea despite the refined appearance the man had created. He had said he'd been a kind of trouble child. Maybe this was one of those unexpected things from his past, the ones Will had been wanting to know.

Hannibal nodded.

“While I was a student in Paris, that was my usual mode of transportation,” he said casually, as if it shouldn’t surprise anyone, “which is fortunate for you, as I will be able to help you learn. That way, we can avoid any unfortunate injuries or accidents.”

Will made a considering sound, honestly impressed. Hannibal had a wider range of experience and expertise than he had expected. He guessed Hannibal would continue to surprise him for a while yet, at least until they got to know each other well enough that they could predict each other. While Will was used to getting to that point much faster than his companions, he had an idea Hannibal might not be far behind this time. He thought they might be a good match in that way.

“Well, that’s definitely lucky for me,” Will agreed, “Sure would slow me down if I broke a leg or something, wouldn’t it?”

Despite the joke, Hannibal looked at Will with serious consideration.

“Now that we have left, you have switched to referring to yourself in the singular, rather than us both as a unit,” he noted, “I hope you do not intend to leave me behind.”

Will frowned. He hadn’t realized he had done that, and it was stupid of him to do. He had been trying to accept the fact he would probably have to go most of the way alone, but he shouldn’t have let that slip into his speech pattern. He knew Hannibal was smart, and he should have known he would catch it.

“No,” he said carefully, “I’m not planning to leave you behind. I doubt that would work, anyhow, since you’re clearly stronger and faster than I am right now. No, I guess I’m just worried you won’t want to go all the way with me, and I don’t want to be disappointed when I’m on my own again. Sorry.”

Hannibal smiled. For whatever reason, that had either amused or pleased him. His red eyes flashed.

“You have no need to apologize,” he said brightly, “In fact, I would find it foolish of you to trust me so entirely after knowing me for such a short amount of time. While I have no intention to abandon you, I find it apt that you are prepared for the possibility.”

Will smiled, but his brow furrowed with his confusion. Hannibal was definitely different from most people, and Will didn’t think this kind of difference could be attributed to the infection. As far as he had been able to tell, Hannibal’s mental processes didn’t seem inhuman in any way, though he supposed he had little frame of reference, all things considered.

“Alright. Good to know,” Will said, though he wasn’t sure how to feel about it all.

They walked in silence for a few minutes, each lost in their own worlds of thought.

Will was wondering if there was a limit to the questions he was allowed to ask Hannibal about the infection and his condition. So far, Hannibal had answered everything with his usual calm courtesy, but Will didn't know if that had been in order to keep the peace in the commune, or if he really was that comfortable with what he was.

"Have you noticed any progression of the infection within yourself?" Will asked, unable to keep it to himself anymore. If Hannibal got upset, he would be upset. That was that, and it wouldn't change just because Will was too afraid to ask.

Hannibal considered it for a moment, his expression amused. Will wondered what it took to actually get under the man's skin, agitate him enough that he would drop this mask of amiability. Ideally, Will would never have to find out for himself. But he couldn't help wondering.

"I gather you mean by way of any signs of decay or loss of mental faculty," Hannibal said teasingly, "as you've seen those infected creatures that bumble about as if they have no brains, while we know their bodies are still governed by at least a facsimile of one. If I was not sure you ask only out of scientific curiosity, I may have been offended."

Will pressed his lips together, watching Hannibal as he spoke. He wasn't used to anyone teasing him so freely. Beverly had been the closest thing he'd had to a real friend before all this happened, and she didn't tease him often. Their line of work was too serious for that, and Will's mood usually too sour.

He supposed he'd made Hannibal feel comfortable with him, and now they were supposed to be friends. He would have to get used to this kind of interaction.

"There have been no changes that I have noticed along those lines," Hannibal said, still pleasant, "though I am sure that is an unreliable gauge, as mental decline could cause me to be unaware of the very symptom. Margot has not marked any noticeable changes in my behavior or abilities, and I have known her before the outbreak. I do trust her for that. I suppose you shall have to note my behavior while we are traveling. Mark any decline you may see."

Will nodded. It was good to know most of this was just how Hannibal was, and had little to nothing to do with the infection.

"Margot was a patient of yours?" Will asked, pretty sure he knew the answer, but not wanting to be rude.

Hannibal nodded.

"She came to me for therapy because her brother had not put me in his pocket already. It did not take long for him to show up at my door and attempt it."

Will studied Hannibal for a moment, trying to decide how that had gone. Margot still liked him well enough, so he hadn't completely given in to Mason's demands, but he didn't get the feeling he had really turned himself into a problem for Mason either.

“You manipulated him,” Will guessed, “you played at being a double agent, so no matter what happened, whoever came out on top would think you were their ally.”

Hannibal shrugged.

“I was always rooting for Margot to succeed,” he said, “but I wasn’t entirely sure she would be able to overcome her aversion to killing in order to do so.”

Will nodded, considering that. Hannibal hadn’t been a regular psychiatrist. He had known he must have been a strange kind of therapist before, but now he realized he had been unorthodox on the verge of being unethical. He had been encouraging Margot to kill Mason.

“Are you frightened of me now?” Hannibal asked, peering sidelong at Will curiously.

Will shrugged.

“I’ve never had any great love for psychiatrists,” he said, “I guess I feel validated, hearing what kind of therapy it is you offered.”

Hannibal laughed. It was a good laugh, and he looked relaxed.

“When dealing with a situation as convoluted as the Vergers, one has to take an unprecedented approach. I did what I thought was best.”

Will nodded again. He understood, but the way Hannibal talked about it, he didn’t think he had any remorse, and hadn’t hesitated to twist things to his benefit. Will thought there was a lot more to it than he was saying, and he would have to keep tabs on what Hannibal did and said.

“You did not answer my question,” Hannibal prodded, and Will realized he hadn’t.

“I’m not afraid of you, Hannibal,” he said, “maybe I should be, and I’m a fool for it, but I’m not. You’ve had plenty of opportunities to kill me, and you haven’t. I figure you still might, but there’s no use in worrying over that right now.”

Hannibal smiled.

“I’m pleased by that, at least,” Hannibal said, “we would have a much more difficult time on our journey if we were frightened of each other.”

Will smirked.

“And you’re not afraid of me?” he asked, “I’m a trained FBI agent, used to be a cop. What if I have such a strong sense of morality I decide to kill you for what you’ve confessed, and what you are?”

Hannibal looked up into the clear blue sky, clearly still amused.

“You might, but there’s no use in worrying over that right now,” he said, parroting Will’s own words back to him.

That wasn’t the foundation for a healthy friendship. Friends didn’t normally expect the other to someday decide to kill them, and have both parties just be fine with that.

Most likely, Hannibal didn’t really have anything to worry about anyway, since Will doubted he would be able to kill him unless he managed to catch him off guard, which would be difficult. They were safe from each other for now, neither having any real motivation to kill the other. They would just have to be careful to notice any change in that dynamic.

Will grinned, honestly feeling happy despite the circumstances. Things were so uncomplicated right now. He didn’t have to worry about going to work, grading papers, getting a call from Jack. He didn’t have to worry about how people would see him, how he would act in order to keep the peace. He could just exist, and whatever would happen would happen. The sky was clear, the breeze was cool, and he could smell honeysuckle blooms. He felt peace.

It probably said something not terribly flattering about him that he could relax better during the actual apocalypse than he ever could have during a regular nine to five. He would have to keep it mostly to himself, or else he was sure Hannibal would love to analyze it.

Things were fine.

10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will seemed to be in high spirits. Hannibal thought it likely part of it was simply due to having lied convincingly enough to get what he wanted. He felt he had fooled Margot and Hannibal both, and was now free to do what he wanted.

Hannibal didn't think that was all of it, though. Will seemed relaxed. Hannibal thought Will was thriving in these circumstances.

Many people with anxiety turned out to be remarkably cool in times of crisis, and Hannibal thought that may explain Will's good mood.

When the worst happened, and their fears were validated, the chronically anxious felt their nerves settle as their minds were prepared for the situation. They could function far better than others, because they had already examined every avenue. If Will, with his powerful imagination, did not fall into that category at least partially, Hannibal would be greatly surprised.

Imagination often came with fear as a partner, and the strength of Will's imagination was huge. Hannibal expected he was afraid more often than not. This was a rare privilege, to see him so at ease.

Hannibal did still wonder about Will. He seemed much more comfortable navigating by map and compass than most people would. Though he had worked in the FBI before the outbreak, Hannibal could tell he was used to manual work the way a blue collar man would be. He was curious.

"Are you very used to camping and hiking?" Hannibal asked, hoping to encourage Will to begin talking about himself.

Will looked up from the map, noting what the mile marker said.

"You could say that," he answered vaguely.

Hannibal continued to look at Will, silently willing him to continue. Eventually, Will sighed and put the map into his pocket.

"I grew up poor," he said, "moving around a lot. I learned a lot of skills, including the ones for surviving in the wild. Sometimes it was like camping. And I spent a lot of time out in the woods anyhow, so I'm comfortable with it."

Hannibal nodded. That made sense, and explained why Will seemed so used to working with his hands. He probably did most of his home repairs himself, and likely had a hobby like repairing cars or something of the sort. Something he could use to keep his hands busy and

his mind distracted from the inanities of life. That would prove helpful to them if they did acquire motorcycles, as Hannibal thought it more than likely Will would be able to perform any repairs they may need along the way.

“What about you?” Will asked, “you don’t present like the kind of person to spend a lot of time outdoors, but you didn’t try to wear one of your bespoke suits on this trek.”

Hannibal laughed.

“I am not deluded into thinking I can expect to have the lifestyle I was used to before the outbreak,” he said, “when I was young, I became very familiar with surviving on my own, so falling back onto those skills has benefited me now.”

Will nodded in consideration. Hannibal wondered if Will was as curious about him as the reverse. Maybe Will was carefully making note of every detail Hannibal offered, creating a profile the way he did with criminals at his FBI job. Hannibal hoped Will found him that interesting, and he was curious what Will thought of him.

“You have no family you are worried about?” Hannibal asked, wanting to learn as much as he could while Will was in the mood to talk. He couldn’t be sure when or if he would get another chance to ask freely and be fairly sure Will would answer honestly.

Will shrugged.

“Never knew my mom, dad died while I was in the academy, only child. I never had much of a family to begin with, and no one to go looking for.”

“No one but this killer.”

Will fell silent, staring down at the road in front of his shoes with a frown. Hannibal wondered what about this line of conversation had made Will suddenly uncomfortable.

Perhaps it had something to do with the mentality of the killer. If Will had not learned to build adequate boundaries between the minds of the killers he hunted and his own mind, perhaps he absorbed aspects of their personalities. He might find himself thinking as they did, and might even not want to catch them.

Hannibal couldn’t predict how his mind would have handled being steeped in the mind of a killer, and then placed into a coma. There were so many possibilities, and Hannibal was curious to find out which it was. He hoped Will would let him.

“I guess everyone at the commune thinks I’m crazy,” Will said, his tone ripe with resentment, “worried about a serial killer during the zombie apocalypse.”

Hannibal blinked, curious why Will would decide to take the conversation in that direction.

“If they do, they have entirely lost perspective,” Hannibal offered honestly, “there is no way to determine how someone will behave in these circumstances, and yours are stranger than most. But, if I may, why are you so determined to save this one girl?”

Will sighed heavily and scrubbed a hand over his face. There was a debate in his eyes, trying to decide if he would tell Hannibal the truth about this.

At length, Will took a deep breath and nodded.

“I guess you probably have some theories about me,” he said, his tone bitter, “all psychiatrists love me for that. I guess I might as well put some to bed and confirm the others. I’ve got an empathy disorder, and I can think like anyone. I get into the heads of killers, and that’s how I find them. But it doesn’t only work one way. It’s like I open a door in my head, and anything can walk right in. Usually, the killers do.”

Will chewed his lip, casting his eyes all around. He was nervous and uncomfortable.

“This guy, the Shrike. He loves his daughter. Abigail. He loves her more than anything. He loves her so deeply and desperately that he couldn’t bear the thought of her leaving home to go to college. He didn’t know how to keep her with him, except by killing and eating her. But he knows if he does that, she’ll be gone. And he doesn’t want that either. So, he killed a bunch of girls that were like her, trying to consume her by proxy.”

Will put a hand to his forehead, as if he could feel the presence of Hobbs within his skull. He furrowed his brow, and Hannibal wished he could stop and draw Will that instant. He was beautiful.

“She’s trapped with him. And if things go bad, he doesn’t have any qualms about cannibalism. That’s one thing I know for sure. I just-”

Will cut off, shaking his head and frowning.

“Because of how much he loves her, and how long I’ve been trying to get into his head, I feel the same way. Not entirely. It’s like a phantom of what he feels. A distorted reflection. I love her so much I want to protect her, but I don’t want to eat her. I don’t know if that makes any sense. I just can’t sit by and let her get killed if I can help. I have to find out if she’s alive, and save her if I can. She deserves to live.”

Hannibal was enthralled. It was more than he had guessed, and far more fascinating than he had expected. Will truly was an anomaly, and Hannibal was glad he hadn’t died. If Hannibal were one to believe in fate, he would have thought they were destined to meet. He felt Will was uniquely suited to understand him, and potentially become like him. They could become something more together, and Hannibal wanted that.

Never before had Hannibal desired companionship as dearly as he did now, with Will.

“Then I will do everything I can to help you on this journey,” Hannibal said, and he felt it was the truth.

Will shook his head, likely not believing Hannibal’s statement. Probably because of the lies he had told to get them here. He thought Hannibal would abandon him when the truth came out.

“I appreciate that,” Will said, “I just hope we’re not too late.”

Will had asserted that Hobbs would still be alive, due to his skills in survival and his lifestyle. If that was true, Hannibal thought it very likely the girl was still alive as well. There would be nothing threatening to take her from him other than the infected, which Hobbs should be able to defend against fairly well. She could not go to college, so she was effectively a prisoner there as he was.

That being as it was, it was surely not a good place for the girl to be. She was trapped with her lifelong tormentor, and had no escape in sight. That would be devastating.

It would be good if they could save her.

And, if Will was right about their particular diet, it could give Hannibal an opportunity to perform an experiment. One he had been looking for a chance to test for a while, though he had not found the right subject yet. He was sure Will would not object to Hobbs becoming a labrat, if it meant what Hannibal thought it did.

He would just have to convince Will of it. He thought he had enough time for that, considering how far they were meant to travel.

—

Will could tell Hannibal was curious about him, maybe beyond the degree that most psychiatrists were. He didn’t know exactly why, but it might just have been the fact that Will didn’t treat him like a monster. It felt like he was allowing that to be the excuse for a lot of Hannibal’s behavior, but he knew it could explain all of it. Depending on how desperate for company Hannibal really was, he might behave entirely differently than he usually would in the face of a potential friendship.

Will would just have to keep tabs on it, and hopefully not let it get too far.

“What about you?” Will asked, trying not to awkwardly make this entire conversation about himself, “do you have any family you looked for when shit hit the fan?”

Hannibal shook his head.

“The majority of my immediate family died when I was young, and I have not had contact with the remaining members for many years. I suppose, in this way, we are much alike.”

Will could tell there was a story there, but the way Hannibal spoke forbade him from asking further. It was probably something Hannibal hadn’t told anyone else, and Will was still basically a stranger.

“Guess so,” Will agreed casually, “and I bet that’s actually an advantage for you in this situation. You can be much more objective, and you don’t have to worry about seeing someone you love as one of those creatures.”

Then, Will considered it more.

“Though, I guess that means you have no way of knowing if what happened to you is based on genetic factors,” he mused, “and being from another country, you aren’t as likely to find someone here who shares that gene, though it’s not entirely impossible. You’re the only one like you that you know of?”

When Will looked back at Hannibal with the question, he found those red eyes fixed on him with an intense warmth he couldn’t quite explain. He tore his gaze away quickly, not sure what to make of that.

“You have voiced exactly my thoughts on the matter,” Hannibal said, “I am the only one I know of so far, yes. Perhaps, were I in or near Chicago, I could be more sure of it being an inherited trait or not. As it is, my sample size is small and insufficient.”

Will nodded, trying not to think too hard about what Hannibal’s odd expression meant. He probably just had to get used to the way the man thought and behaved. Maybe the coma had made some wires get crossed or something, making it harder to get a read on Hannibal.

While that was possible, Will considered it unlikely. He could still read other people just fine. It wouldn’t make sense for any kind of head injury to interfere with his ability to understand one person in particular. There had to be a more simple explanation.

Probably, based on what Will knew about Hannibal now, he was just remarkably good at hiding things. He was a psychiatrist who had trauma. It wouldn’t be good if he wore his heart on his sleeve in front of his patients. He must have crafted an armor so complex and sturdy that even Will’s mind couldn’t find the gaps and fill in the rest. It was impressive, and just made Will all the more curious about him.

As they walked, Will became aware of a low, constant sound. His first thought was a generator, or something electrical, but he quickly dismissed that because of how far away they were from the estate, and the electrical grid had been down for a while by now. It took him a lot longer than he cared to admit to realize what he was hearing.

Flies.

So many flies.

Will grabbed Hannibal’s arm to quietly get his attention, and Hannibal looked at him questioningly. Will was sure he heard it too, but he didn’t seem to have made the connection Will had finally made.

“Flies,” Will whispered, “There has to be a group of the infected nearby. They still rot. The flies still swarm. There are so many of them.”

Hannibal’s eyes lit with understanding, and he nodded.

“There must be many infected,” he said, “I have not ever heard them before I smelled them before. They must be down wind.”

Will glanced around, seeing that the road would probably take them closer to the infected.

They should be close to the town they were aiming for, as well, and Will came to an unfortunate conclusion.

“It’s the town,” he said, “That’s where they are. We’re going to have to go around, try the next town instead. If there are enough that we hear the flies, it’s not safe.”

Hannibal agreed easily, and didn’t seem all that put off by their rerouting so early in the journey. Will, though, was more than irritated by it. This was just the first in what was probably going to be a series of bad things happening to them. They couldn’t look for bikes as soon, now, so they were stuck walking for longer than he had been hoping, and the few supplies they hadn’t been able to get from the compound also had to wait until they could find a safe town.

Will quickly planned a new path, and begrudgingly led Hannibal away from the buzzing sound.

Chapter End Notes

If you've noticed that I'm posting a new chapter of nearly all my neglected fics, ssshhhhhhh. Just accept it. I'm going through a thing right now and need to convince myself I'm not a bad fic parent. I'm not abandoning anything ever. They're just hibernating. Anyway, I hope you're enjoying all my manic updates.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!